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THE CHRISTIANITY OF
ST. PAUL

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THE CHRISTIANITY OF ST. PAUL

BY

S. A. ✓ ALEXANDER, M.A.

READER OF THE TEMPLE CHURCH, AND EXAMINING CHAPLAIN
TO THE BISHOP OF HEREFORD
FORMERLY TUTOR OF KEBLE COLLEGE, OXFORD

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PREFACE

THE present volume, as will be seen at a glance, does not aim at anything like an exhaustive treatment of Pauline theology. The sermons of which it consists were preached at the Temple Church as part of an attempt to illustrate, in a direct and practical and simple way, the mind of St. Paul on certain great aspects of the Christian faith. They were originally composed, and are now printed, in the conviction that some service may always be done by even the humblest effort to draw attention to the teaching of the New Testament and to the spirit and temper of the Apostolic Church.

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The Christianity of St. Paul

I

ST. PAUL'S CONCEPTION OF GOD

“Who hath known the mind of the Lord?”

—ROM. xi. 34.

IT is a charge sometimes brought against the world's various forms of religious belief, and even against Christianity itself, that they have taught and fostered unworthy ideas of God. Though the accusation is generally made with an air of intellectual and moral superiority, as of those who are thoroughly emancipated from all littleness of view, and have themselves reached a perfect conception of the

Divine Nature, we need not hesitate to allow that there is some truth in it—some truth, at least, as far as it concerns a great many disciples even of the purest creed. Christians, no doubt, there have been and are, whose conceptions of God are inadequate even to the verge of triviality and childishness—involving, when analysed, all sorts of moral impossibilities and contradictions. When we think or speak of God as a Being whose government and actions are easily comprehended and explained, or as a Man, infinitely greater, it may be, and wiser than ourselves, yet, like ourselves, full of partialities and petty schemes and unjust thoughts: when we so speak or think, we are fairly open to such a charge as this.

Yet it is to be remembered that, after all, there is little real difference between us in this respect, and certainly no room for contempt or pride in the wisest among us. The man

of broad culture and profound learning and experience may have a larger and nobler idea of God than the untrained, unthoughtful mind; but confront them both with the Divine reality, and the difference between them dwindles to a vanishing-point. Whatever his intellectual capacity or penetrating power of thought, "no man hath seen God at any time." Into the mysterious splendour of that awful Presence the best and wisest of us has but taken a step or two out of the dark. The man who is born blind has, perhaps, formed some conception of the nature of light. He knows readily enough when the world about him is lying in light, in twilight, or in darkness. But question him on the sunlight and shadow of the pinewoods, the moon rising over dark waters, the iridescent arch of the rainbow, or the flushing and fading of a July sunset, and he will be at a loss to understand your words. It is so with the human mind

in its contemplation of God. We have been inspired with some idea of what He is; we all realise, dimly no doubt, but instinctively and certainly, when He is present in our life, and when He is withdrawn; but, for the rest, and with the help even of that saintliness of character which is a far surer approach to Him than mental gifts and mental discipline, which of us can speak of, or can comprehend, that ineffable Beauty, that unimagined Loveliness?

“Who hath known,” says St. Paul, “the mind of the Lord?” It may help us much in such a subject as this if we take a pure and lofty soul like that of the Apostle to the Gentiles, and try to trace out, in his conduct and writings, the kind of conception of God by which he was possessed. Such an examination might show us, among other things, that Christianity cannot be justly accused of fostering unworthy ideas of God, unless we

find those ideas prominent in the theology of a representative teacher like St. Paul. Let us notice, then, very briefly four great points which his Epistles disclose.

1. St. Paul's first thought of God, as given in the passage before us, is that of a Being infinitely transcending the utmost range of human thought and imagination—mysterious, incomprehensible. "How unsearchable," he cries, "are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" Modern science, with its profound sense of human ignorance and human limitations, and with its intense reverence and awe (when at its best) before the inscrutable Power who created and rules the world, must surely be more than satisfied with such a phrase as this. Here is a thought—the thought of the fathomless mystery of the Divine life—which lay at the very heart of St. Paul's spiritual experience; and yet it is sometimes denied to Christianity, as if it found

no place in it at all; as if to be a Christian is necessarily to believe that all God's will and all God's work can be read like an open book.

Nor was this an idle speculation with St. Paul. Could he not trace the mysterious character of that handwriting in the records of his own past? To be allowed to grow up to manhood under the rigid discipline of the Pharisaic schools; to be trained in all the bigotry of their thought, in all the narrowness of their ceremonial; to be driven into open violence and outrage on the Church of Christ; and then, in a moment, to be flung off at a tangent, to be compelled to renounce his past life, and to devote himself, body and soul, to a cause which all his education naturally tended to make him hate and despise: here indeed was a concrete and practical example of the truth that God's ways are past finding out. So he

was taught, as much by the experience of life as by the movements of his own mind, that God is the supreme mystery; that nothing befits a Christian less than the complacent shallowness which professes to see no difficulties in the puzzles and perplexities of the world, and never learns to say, in face of the dark problems of the Divine providence, "I do not know."

2. Again, the second leading idea of St. Paul is that of a God present everywhere—a Spirit upholding, sustaining, embracing all things. God, he told the men of Athens, "is not far from every one of us. In Him we live, and move, and have our being." We are familiar in history with that view of God which imagines Him to have created the worlds long ago by one original impulse of His power, and then to have withdrawn into a remote (and shall we say, cynical?) silence, taking no more part in the growth

and progress of life and the destinies of man ; and we generally find also, in ages when this view has been prevalent, a tendency to draw sharp lines, in art and conduct and religion, between the holy and the profane, the secular and the sacred, the things in which God is and the things in which He cannot be. With all such beliefs St. Paul is perpetually at war. He insists that the Divine agency is everywhere and always at work—that God is present everywhere, and that everything is sacred which is done as in His presence. His practical conclusion from this truth is summed up in his wonderful words to the Christians of Corinth: “Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

3. But great as are these two thoughts of God—of God as incomprehensible and of God as omnipresent—they would hardly, in themselves, make a sufficient basis for a

religious faith. The belief in an incomprehensible God might end in pure agnosticism, and the belief in an omnipresent God in pure pantheism. But St. Paul has two other thoughts by which we shall find these two qualified and corrected. God is present everywhere: yes, but He is present not with an indefinite vagueness, but as a Person—a Person who cares for and watches over the individual life and its smallest interests. All St. Paul's arguments are full of the sense of God as a personal Friend, and Guide, and Comforter, and Judge. And here again his belief is singularly in keeping with that highest thought of our time which realises that, if God is present everywhere, it is because the little is as much to Him as the great. Just as the sun bathes the whole world in its warmth and splendour, and yet gives to every individual bud and blossom the same full glow of its strength and sweetness, so is it with Him by

whose same creating and controlling power star revolves round star in the empty spaces of the sky and the tiniest insect creeps in the forest leaves.

4. And lastly, if God is incomprehensible, He is not, to St. Paul, the Unknown God. He is a God who has not left Himself without witness. Out of His silence has come a Word to men; and that Word is Jesus Christ. When St. Paul found at Athens an altar to the Unknown God, he took this agnosticism as the text of the famous sermon, of which only a bare abstract has come down to us; and he showed that that God of whom the Greeks declared their ignorance *had* revealed Himself in the life and work and person of the Son of Man—that, as he elsewhere expresses it, the dazzling brightness which no man could look upon and live had been reflected, in a more intelligible, human, and familiar way, as a glory shining

in the face of Jesus Christ. It is in Christ, therefore, St. Paul felt, that we have received the highest revelation of God as yet possible to man—the knowledge, imperfect indeed, yet clear so far as it goes, of one who, having seen Him, “hath seen the Father.”

And this revelation is ours, partly, it may be, through the study of His teaching and the intellectual grasp of His truth, but still more certainly, still more completely, through the patient following of His example. To measure all things by the pattern of Christ; to make the imitation of Him the centre of existence; to have “the mind,” and to be fired by the spirit, of Christ; to see things as He saw them, to feel things as He felt them, to judge things as He judged them, to estimate failure and success as He estimated them; to look out upon the world with those larger eyes of His; to have His love of goodness, His pity for the suffering, His

burning indignation against wrong; to think and speak and act as we believe He would have us think and speak and act, as we believe He would Himself have spoken, thought, and acted if He were among us to-day—that was the dream, the passion, of St. Paul; that is the secret of the Christian life.

II

ST. PAUL AND THE CROSS

“I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”—1 COR. ii. 2.

IT must be obvious to us all that, whatever other men have thought or fancied about the Christian faith, St. Paul's conception of it was unfalteringly simple and direct. Christianity is Christ—that, and nothing more and nothing less than that, is St. Paul's profession of belief. Between that Divine yet human Figure and himself neither the Church nor the world can let fall an intercepting veil. “To me,” he says, in perhaps the boldest words that are to be found in the Bible, “to me to live is Christ;” and the constant dream and passion and aspiration

of his life is to be with Christ, to be like Christ, to have the mind of Christ, to realise the presence of Christ, and to see Christ as He is.

But there are many Christs in the gospel story: which of them is the object of St. Paul's adoring love? There is the faithful Shepherd, who keeps His flock peacefully folded on the silent hills. There is the great Teacher, who draws men to His side by new and luminous ideas. There is the good Physician, who cares for suffering humanity. There is the pitiful Christ, whose eyes no man or woman who has once looked into them can forget. There is the triumphant Christ, riding victorious over sin and death. There is the angry Christ, with face like flame, scourging the money - changers from His Father's house. Which of these is the Christ whom St. Paul longs for and worships, and in the thought of whom he lives? It is none

—none of all these. Christ in His hour of shame and sorrow; Christ in His last extremity of unpopularity and degradation; Christ suffering, tortured, and outcast—this is the Christ of whom St. Paul is dreaming. “I determined,” he writes to the intellectual and cultured Church of Corinth,—“I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” Christ crucified, therefore, is the burden of St. Paul’s message. “We preach Christ crucified,” he writes to the same Corinthians. “Jesus Christ,” he tells the Galatians, “hath been set forth crucified among you.” So all his preaching centres in the Cross. What is his fear at Corinth? It is “lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none effect.” What is his charge against false teachers at Philippi? It is that they “are enemies of the Cross of Christ.” What is his repeated warning to the Galatians? It

is that "the offence of the Cross" has not ceased; that men must "suffer persecution for the Cross of Christ;" and that, for himself, he dare not glory in anything "save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," by whom," he says, "the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

And this symbol of our highest and best humanity is still the symbol of the Church. Modern Christianity, like conventional Christianity in all ages, may try to shake itself free from the associations and the claims of the Cross; but it still remains, and will remain to the end of time, the true centre of Christian endeavour and aspiration. When all has been said that can be said on the intellectual basis and dogmatic system of the Church; when all has been said that can be said on the artistic influence of Christianity, and the way in which it has inspired the poet with his visions and the painter with his

dreams; when all has been said that can be said on the social authority of a creed which has created empires, and moulded society, and formulated laws, and given a sense of kinship to the human race: there is left, supreme above everything else, that sight from which the heart and tears of humanity can never be withdrawn—the sight of “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

To St. Paul the Cross had a twofold significance. It meant an atonement for the sins of mankind: it meant a moral example of sacrifice and of antagonism to the world. Let us dwell for a moment on this moral example in its double aspect.

1. Sacrifice—self-denial: this is a quality which we universally and instinctively honour in others, even when we can make no claim to it ourselves. Which of us is not filled with some generous admiration when we hear of a man or woman making a large sacrifice of

happiness to duty, or spending wealth and health and energy in devotion to a great cause, or resigning the comforts and the privileges of life in order to go about doing good? It is true that when the sacrifice reaches a certain point, we are rather apt to pity the victim as a madman or a fool; but, as a general rule, everything of this kind arouses the respect and wins the real homage of us all. And it is, perhaps, the only thing in the world that is certain to do so. Why then is there so little of it in ourselves? Why do we meet so often with men who are ready to be Christians, but only up to the point at which Christianity begins to make a definite and practical call upon their time and money: who, when the needs of any work are brought before them—a work having, it may be, a special and peculiar claim upon their help—shut up their purses and withdraw their

sympathies? Yet they are Christians; and they would be offended if you were to ask them to define Christianity, or to point out, accurately and precisely, in what their own Christianity consists. They are Christians; and they would be offended if you were to tell them, as indeed we are bound to tell them, whether they like it or not, that no man is a Christian who is not trying, however falteringly and imperfectly, yet with some real earnestness and sincerity, to follow in the steps of a crucified Christ.

2. Again, the Cross meant to St. Paul antagonism to the world. It must be clear to all of us, when we come to reflect upon it, that the moral standards of the world and the moral standards of Christianity have never been, and can never be, reconciled together; and that the Christian, as a member of "that small, transfigured band whom the world is powerless to tame," is of necessity flung into

some sort of disagreement from, some measure of opposition to, the society in which he moves and the times in which he lives. We know how this antagonism began with Christ Himself. From the very first He was an offence and a paradox to the morality of His day; and that, not merely to the morality of the vicious or the thoughtless, but to the supposedly high morality of accredited teachers like the Pharisee and the Scribe; until, at the last, Calvary witnessed the climax of His opposition to what the world held right and good. Christ, if we may so speak, was always in a minority. It will be so with ourselves, if we are faithful to our calling. If you can find in your business or profession nothing which deserves your censure and rebuke; if you are never tempted to turn your back on any of the habits, pastimes, or amusements of ordinary society, as unworthy of your Christian manhood; if you never feel degraded in

your blind obedience to the dictates of public opinion ; if you can always accept, and acquiesce in, everything that the world about you cares for, and wishes for, and thinks of, and judges, and believes, and is amused by—then you may feel an absolute confidence in your soul that there is something wrong with your religion. What St. Paul has called “the offence of the Cross” has not ceased ; and if you are not a rebel against the world, you are weighed in the balances and found wanting.

Such, then, were the two great moral lessons which the Apostle drew from the Cross—the lesson of self-denial, and the lesson of antagonism to the world. Doubtless we should be glad, many of us, to see the last of this Cross. We live now in epicurean times. The stoicism and spiritual independence of the old creed have become somewhat distasteful to us. We like to spend our days in ease and

quiet and complacency, and see the wheels of life run smoothly. Why should we not eliminate the Cross? A Christianity made up of music and of flowers; a Christianity soothing, and emotional, and æsthetic; a Christianity of noble architecture and graceful eloquence and harmonious chantings and solemn ritual; a Christianity that will give us a good deal and not ask too much of us in return: would not this be a religion more congenial to the temper of our day? It may be so; but at least it would not be the Christianity of Christ. When deep calls to deep, and His voice summons and your spirit makes reply, you know that it is not a comfortable and sentimental creed that supports a man's failing footsteps through this dark world; nor was it any such that Christ offered to the soul. He thought too nobly of man to suppose that he would be satisfied with an æstheticism however beautiful, a philosophy however pro-

found. There are heights above these in human life—heights which we too are capable of reaching—and the Cross is planted on their summit. When St. Paul took up his stand at the foot of that Cross, to spend there the remainder of his life, he was aware that the sight of that Divine sufferer meant something far more practical for him than either an outburst of unavailing grief or the idleness of a personal security. If (to use his own phrase) his sins were nailed to that Cross; if the forgiveness of his sins was promised and symbolised in those pierced hands;—it was not a forgiveness which left him nothing to do. He too, as it were, was crucified; he too had to show forth in himself the same two graces of self-denial and of superiority to the world, after the Divine example. We know how well St. Paul fulfilled his task when we see him, in his writings and in his missionary journeys, spending his life for

others, and by word and example rebuking and uplifting the low moral ideals of his day. It is left for each one of us, according to our various opportunities, to follow in his steps; to prove ourselves ready, in that metaphor of his which includes just the two thoughts on which we have been dwelling, to "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ"; and to show the world, by our willingness to serve, and by our scorn of moral compromise, that the Church is indeed an institution intended for something more than to touch men's artistic sensibilities or arouse their intellectual interest.

"There are many eyes," it has been said, "that can detect and honour the prudent and household virtues; there are many that can discern genius on his starry track; but when that love which is all-suffering, all-abstaining, all-aspiring, which has vowed to itself that it will be a wretch and also a fool in this

world, sooner than soil its white hands by any compliances, comes into our streets and houses—only the pure and aspiring can know its face, and the only compliment they can pay it, is to own it.”

III

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

“Hath not the potter power over the clay?”

—ROM. ix. 21.

IT is an old, familiar, prophetic image which St. Paul uses here, as he applies to the relation between the human life and God the metaphor of the potter and the clay. Tinged with the mysterious significance almost of an Oriental fatalism, it had come to him not from the secret chambers of his own fertile brain, but from the pages of those great national prophets at whose feet he had sat so many years. Jeremiah and Isaiah both had found in this striking metaphor something like a clue to the perpetual riddle of human character and fortune and discipline and destiny.

We remember how Jeremiah went down, as he tells us, to the potter's house, and watched his hands busy about the moving wheels, and saw him take a piece of clay, which had been spoilt as he was making it up into a particular kind of vessel, and remodel it into something else; and how, as he stood entranced by the spectacle of the workman's subtlety and skill, he heard, as in a dream, a Divine voice that said: "Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel." In human art, stamping its own imperious will on the responsive material, the prophet sees a significant illustration of God's absolute power in dealing with national life. Or we remember, again, more than one passage of Isaiah in which the same penetrating thought shines out; passages in which he pleads for resignation to the Divine will, or calls upon God to reveal Himself in His omnipotence. "We

are the clay," he cries, "and Thou our potter ; and we all are the work of Thy hand." It was by teachers such as these that St. Paul was inspired, as he argued for the admission of Gentile as well as Jew into the Church of Christ ; declared, as it were, the absolute right of the Maker to do as He would, in anger or mercy, to the thing made ; and poured out his fiery indignant questions on the Roman converts : "O man, who art thou that repliest against God ? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus ? Hath not the potter power over the clay ?"

We should be far indeed from the truth if we imagined that this is a mere metaphor, a simile, an apt piece of imagery, and nothing more. The metaphors of the Epistles, like the parables of the Gospels, are full of spiritual meaning, and are worth all the study that we can give them.

1. The metaphor implies, first, that the world has had a spiritual origin, and came to be what it is by the action of a spiritual agency. As the clay, under the potter's touch, takes the impress of a human mind and will, so it is Mind which created and governs the world, and reaches "through nature, moulding men." There are moods in which we are inclined to see in the world nothing but a vast, dead, whirling machine, driven on by pitiless, iron laws, and carrying us and all about us round and round in a mad, meaningless rush and roar, until the fires that once set it in motion shall at last have burnt themselves out. Perhaps we have been touched by the sadness, the cruelty, or the incomparable frivolity of human life. We have seen, it may be, a good man's life wrecked for no apparent cause or fault of his own, while vice goes on its prosperous way unpunished and unabashed. We have

brooded over the tardiness of justice, the waste of good, the fierce strength of passion, the pathos of mortality. Moments have come in our own life or in the lives of others when we thought that God *must* speak, and God has been silent; when we thought that God must interfere, and no sign has been given in the white blank of the heavens above. And then, perhaps, our tangled and haunting thoughts have shaped themselves at last into one clear question: "Is there, indeed, behind it all, a God who hears and knows and listens and judges; or am I bound by some blind, stupid force to the wheels of life, in chains that never can be broken because there is no one to break them or to hear my cry?"

It is not irreligious or immoral, as some may suppose, to ask such questions; the circumstances of life may compel us to ask them. Stranger still, it may be almost a

part of our faith and hope that we *should* ask them. You are the clay, St. Paul would tell us; thinking clay, not senseless and inert—that is the difference; but you too are as the clay in this, that you do not know the Potter's will or what He is working for. And there we touch the centre of the Christian position. Christianity has never believed in a God who can be readily understood or whose ways are plain. "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself," "His ways are past finding out:" such are the expressions of men whose faith in the Divine government of the world never faltered. They believed in God none the less because of the enigmas and perplexities that lay about them. If the world were indeed the product of a blind, unconscious force, surely, in the myriad years that have passed over this earth of ours since it blossomed into organic life, men would have found out

the simple truth about it long ago, and would be troubled no longer, as even the most dogmatic materialist is still troubled, by the

“Blank misgivings of a creature
Moving about in worlds not realised.”

But if the temporary contradictions of the world are actually, as Christianity affirms, part and parcel of God's deliberate plan, and He makes indistinct the traces of His handiwork just because He is aiming at faith and courage in the human soul, and at a moral development and education and discipline which could not otherwise be attained, then we may fairly ask whether, given such conditions, we should not expect to see exactly such a world as that in which we live—a world whose larger ends obviously lie outside the scope of human thought to fathom or interpret.

2. But St. Paul's metaphor goes still fur-

ther, by showing us how irresistible is the Power which has called the universe into being. We sometimes see a man going out into life with a buoyant self-confidence. He will be the master of his fortunes. Circumstances shall bend this way or that as he chooses. Persons, events, all that happens—his own gifts and character and opportunities—all shall work together as he may decide. Presently he finds that life is not what he anticipated. Circumstances seem to shut him in, events to control him, persons to thwart and encroach upon him; things turn out hard and stubborn, and refuse to obey him; his very character begins to look as if it were determined for him by somebody or something not himself. He is the clay; he lies helpless; and invisible hands do with him what they will. A strange power—is it God, or Fate, or Destiny?—envelops him, and shapes him he knows not how. Driven

by some of the tendencies of modern thought, he flies perhaps to an extreme. As he contemplates the reign of universal law, he asks what else he can be but a puppet and a slave, with no more real liberty than a stone tossed by the sea or a leaf blown by the wind; and as he traces the secret and subtle influences of heredity for good or evil in character and life, he feels that he is after all a mere product of the past, irresponsible for what he does, and powerless to be other than what he is.

With all this St. Paul is so far in agreement that he does seek to emphasise the supremacy of the Divine will and the need of human resignation. Doubtless he would have said that, great as is the part played by heredity in human affairs, yet each of us is conscious of being a new individual self—something more, that is, than the result of what has been before; that each of us is

conscious of free will and personal responsibility, and cannot help showing that he is, by approving or condemning, by punishing or rewarding, the conduct of others. But St. Paul did not much care for metaphysical argument; he was concerned rather with the moral aspects of the problem. Whatever gifts or powers, he would have said, God may have permitted you or may have withheld, be sure that His will is the best for you, that He sees more clearly than you the vessel that His hands are fashioning, and that it is your courage and confidence to accept everything and to be resigned. Resignation—it is, at the heart of it, a sad word for most of us; yet it has been the source of all the higher spiritual effort since the world began.

3. The Apostle, however, would leave us with thoughts more comforting than these. If his metaphor implies that God's providence is

watchful over, and His design at work upon, every human life, is it not a metaphor of consolation ? When the potter takes up the formless clay, he knows into what kind of vessel he means to shape it ; and every touch and turn, every stress of sharp tool or pressure of flying wheel, contributes something to the result ; and to each and every several piece of work the potter gives his whole power of ingenuity and care.

May it not be so with the Divine fashioning of our own life ? If modern science has done anything for religion, it is that it has killed for ever the conception of a God who, once in time, set the worlds rolling through space, and then left them to work out their own destinies apart from Himself, and compels us to believe in a God present everywhere, an all-sustaining, all-embracing energy, who knows no difference between the little and the great, and watches the sparrow in its

fall as closely as the nation in its decay. So all the circumstances of life, the disappointments and frustrated hopes, the stress of joys and sorrows, the events of birth, and education, and marriage, and business, and death—all may be meant to carry out the Potter's design for each of us, and to model us after the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

So we can look up at the hands that are at work about us, not with resignation only, but with something of the joyous triumph of the modern poet—

“ But I need, now as then,
 Thee, God, who moulded men ;
 And since, not even while the whirl was worst,
 Did I—to the wheel of life
 With shapes and colours rife
 Bound dizzily—mistake my end, to slake Thy
 thirst :

So, take and use Thy work :
 Amend what flaws may lurk,

What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the
aim !

My times be in Thy hand !

Perfect the cup as planned !

Let age approve of youth, and death complete the
same ! ”

IV

ST. PAUL AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

“Covet earnestly the best gifts.”—I COR. xii. 31.

NO writings in the New Testament give us so clear an insight into the character and conditions of the primitive Church as do St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians. In them we see, as in a picture, a very realistic reproduction of the manner of life of the early Christians and of the manner of their worship. But even more important perhaps to us than such knowledge is the light which these Epistles throw upon St. Paul's own mind on this subject—on St. Paul's own theory of what constitutes the Christian life. In days when men are all too ready to depart from the

primitive simplicity of the Christian Church, and to neglect the weightier matters of the law in favour of various fantastic and unnecessary requirements, it is supremely important that we should look closely, from time to time, at the Christian life as it was conceived by those who first presented it to the world—as it was conceived, especially, by men of surpassing genius like St. John or St. Paul.

What, then, was St. Paul's theory of the Christian life? We find, I think, on an analysis of this first Epistle to the Corinthians, that it had two main aspects.

1. In the first place, St. Paul believed, heart and soul, in a Christianity which is possible under all the ordinary conditions of human life. To St. Paul what constitutes Christianity is simply the spirit in which a man does his appointed work, and not the special kind of work he may have to do.

"Let every man abide," he teaches the Corinthians, "in the same calling wherein he was called;" in other words, whatever occupation a man may have in life, though it be in the drudgery and supposed degradation of a Roman slave, when the claim of Christ has reached him, he must fulfil that claim, he must obey that voice, just as and where he is, consecrating his old life with a new spirit, and not looking for any new sphere of work.

Obviously St. Paul casts aside altogether the notion that there is special holiness in special forms of work, or that any peculiar type of life is necessary to the Christian calling. No doubt these Corinthians were sometimes troubled—and the more earnest they were, the more likely they were to be troubled—by those perplexing thoughts about the Christian life which have disturbed so often the peace of the world. They fancied

no doubt, that some special sanctity was to be found in priestly occupations or in the unmarried state; that, if they wished to be really Christian in the highest sense of the word, they must separate themselves from an evil world; that only if they could cut themselves away from the ties and temptations of life and live apart from other men, as did the monk and the hermit in later days, could they become what Christ meant them to be. The great Apostle, with his Master's teaching and example always before him, was never so misled. He knew that to live in the world and yet be not of it is the highest possibility of the Christian life. He had a very wholesome and a very human sense of the dignity of all true work, if undertaken in a lofty spirit, and of the claim which every man has upon the help and sympathy of every other man. He would not waste in selfish isolation a force that

is to be as the leaven of society and as a light shining through the darkness. That view of the Christian life which makes it dependent upon external circumstance, instead of upon the soul within—so that a man who is tied to a certain kind of task is necessarily less holy than one who can choose for himself a supposedly higher way of living—is, in fact, only the suggestion of a refined materialism; and St. Paul knew it to be so. He knew that Christianity pronounces no work to be mean, or wrong, or vulgar, which is not already such by its own essential character; and that, therefore, so far as things external are concerned, we all start with the same possibilities in the race for goodness. “Covet earnestly”—not this or that occupation, this or that profession, this or that society or environment, in which it may seem easy to you to follow Christ; but, in the powers and qualities

of your own soul—"covet earnestly the best gifts."

2. That is one side of St. Paul's theory of the Christian life. He holds Christianity to be the consecration of all ways of living that are right and lawful in themselves, and not the special choice of any. But there is another aspect of it beyond this. Men who possess a vague sense of the general consecration of life will often succumb to a familiar temptation, in fancying that, as the Christian calling certainly does not compel them to adopt any special line of work, so it does not involve special effort of any sort, and that they are excellent Christians so long as their morals are tolerably good and their every-day duties tolerably well done. They conjecture that God is as easily satisfied with them as they are with themselves. Can anything be imagined more remote from the mind of St. Paul? St. Paul compares every Christian,

in his place in the Christian Church, with the member of a living body ; and just as every member of a body has its own definite and allotted function, which cannot be discharged by any other, and which cannot be intermitted or neglected without mischief to the whole organism, so is it, according to St. Paul, with every Christian. I think the Apostle would have regarded as a very imperfect Christian, perhaps hardly as deserving the great name of Christian at all, anybody who was unable to show him some definite work of service or example, undertaken for the good of others, and for the benefit of the whole Church. "You are a member," he would have said, "of this body, the Church. You are not independent and self-centred. You do not exist in and for yourself. The body has a claim upon you which must be satisfied. Show us, then, what is *your* special function, and how you fulfil it."

And here the Apostle would touch one of the decided failures of modern religious life. If St. Paul were to go round among us, after the manner of Socrates, and examine each one of us in turn as to the definite work he is doing to prove his membership of Christ and to show his gratitude to God, I suppose that not one in twenty of us would be able to look him in the face. In no department of her varied activity has the Church of England hitherto met with so little success as in the matter of setting her laity to work; of inspiring her every member with the desire to do something definite for others, and of finding him something definite to do; of removing from herself the reproach that must still, to some extent, fall upon her, of cherishing an idle, selfish, sentimental creed—a creed that brings her members to the privileges of her worship, but does not drive them out to the help and service of the world. Overburdened

as we are with societies, there is yet, I think, almost room for one society more—a society for finding work for the spiritually unemployed; a society for directing and organising definite, individual, Christian work through every diocese and parish of this country. How vast a store is there in the Church of England of unused enthusiasm, of energy ill-directed or suffered to lie in utter waste! what forces of human pity and tenderness, of indignation against wrong, of passionate desire to help the ignorant and suffering, now left hopelessly and shamefully inactive! And how few, how very few comparatively, are the lives which, by reason of ill-health or other claims upon them, can fairly be exempted from all contribution of this service! It was a pointed question of Archbishop Magee's, in a famous sermon, as to how far we have utilised all the wealth of material that the Church possesses in her laity; how far we have organ-

ised and brought to bear systematically upon the vice and sin and sorrow of our day the vigorous, business-like aptitude of our practical laymen or the tender might of a Christian woman's love; how far we have even aimed at catching and gathering into the one central reservoir of the Church the half-wasted springs of individual benevolence, and pouring them all through well-directed channels to every spot that needs them. And he answers his own question thus: "All this we have scarce begun to do. It is *the* work, it is *the* need of our day."

Such was the Christian life as it appeared to St. Paul—a life which, first, consecrates a man in all the details of his work, and, next, impels him to do something definite for Christ. Nor can we doubt that he practised what he preached. We cannot doubt that, in both aspects of that life—whether in his tent-making or in his missionary labours, whether

in the work he did for himself or in the work he did for others—St. Paul strove earnestly to follow the example of Him whom he knew both as the Carpenter of Nazareth and also as the Saviour of the world.

V

CHARITY BEFORE FAITH

“Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three : but the greatest of these is charity.”—I COR. xiii. 13.

IN studying the Gospel story, most of us have no doubt been struck by the marked difference in the way in which the two great religious bodies of Christ's day, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, were treated by Christ Himself. For the Pharisees He had no words too sharp, no denunciations too bitter, no epithets too severe. Again and again they came into collision with Him, and again and again they were forced to retire before the fierce torrent of His righteous indignation. The very thought of the Pharisees as the religious teachers, the religious representatives, of the

Jewish people, seems to have filled His soul with a burning anger. With the Sadducees it was very different. Once indeed he rebuked the Sadducees and warned His disciples against the spirit they had shown; but then, for once, they had come to Him in combination with the Pharisees. The only occasion on which He is reported to have dealt with the Sadducees alone was that on which they questioned Him with regard to the Resurrection; and then, so far from harshly blaming them, He simply pointed out their intellectual mistake, and contented Himself with the grave and quiet reply, "Ye do greatly err." And thus it is without surprise that we discover, later on, that the Sadducees, as a party, had little or no share in His trial and death.¹ It was the religious Pharisee, not the sceptical Sadducee, that nailed Him to the Cross.

¹ See, however, St. John xi. 49.

What, then, we may ask, is the meaning of this difference of treatment, and what inference must we draw from it? It means, in a word, that Christ, like His great Apostle, puts charity before faith, conduct before creed. In this wonderful chapter, St. Paul's hymn on charity, the writer is proclaiming the supremacy of love. It is greater than hope; it is greater even than faith; and so much greater that he is even able to say, "Though I have *all* faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." Here, then, we find the key to Christ's treatment of the Pharisee and the Sadducee. Look closely, for a moment, at the general characteristics of those two men. The Pharisee was the man of faith; he held firmly all the orthodox belief; tradition was the centre of his system; intellectually his religious life was perfect, practically it was narrow, formal, and hypocritical; he believed,

but he did not act up to his belief. He was the man of faith without charity. The Sadducee, on the other hand, was, in his intellectual tendencies, a sceptic or agnostic; he did not accept the religious beliefs of his day, such as belief in the Resurrection; the centre of *his* system was morality, conduct; he did not believe, and therefore he fell back with the greater emphasis on all that was left to him, on practical and living goodness. He, we might roughly say, was the man of charity without faith.⁷ And the teaching of our Lord and of His Apostles is, that charity without faith is better than faith without charity; that conduct unsupported by a religious creed is better than a creed that does not blossom into conduct; that it is better to be good and to disbelieve in God than to believe in Him and not to be good. And, carrying this principle forward from Judaism into Christianity, we arrive at this conclusion,

that the professing Christian who makes no real effort to live up to his belief is a worse man in the eyes of God than the sceptic or unbeliever who is living a purer, a more humble, a more charitable life than he.¹

"But," it might have been urged against St. Paul, "can we make so sharp a distinction between belief and conduct? Is not creed the soil in which conduct grows, and does not a certain kind of conduct grow necessarily from a certain kind of creed? Is it not true that, as men believe, so they act and live?"

Certainly it ought to be true; but in point of fact it is not true, or only partly so. So curious a structure is the human mind, such a battle-ground of thought and feeling, of reason and emotion, so paradoxical, so inconsistent, so self-deceptive, that a man will constantly hold

¹ For the contrasts of this paragraph (which must, of course, be broadly applied, and cannot be pressed in detail) cf. Dr. S. G. Green's *Jewish Sects and Orders*.

one belief in theory and in practice act upon another; and this not occasionally or under sudden temptation, but in the normal conduct of his life. Sometimes, as the phrase runs, a man is better than his creed. There are some among us, for example, who believe that the vast majority of their fellow-men are passing away before their eyes, one by one, without hope or possibility of change, when once this life is over, into an agony of eternal torment. What would be the conduct naturally belonging to such a creed? The men who hold it would either go mad with the infinite horror of their thoughts, or they would spend themselves, day and night, without pause or rest or power of attending to any other thing, on the task of saving whom they could from so fearful a judgment. Yet, as it is, they eat and drink, and sleep and work, and smile like other men, and pass through life practically unmoved by the belief they hold.

These men are better than their creed. There are others, again, who are not so good as their creed. In every age of Christian history, and especially since the Christian religion became politically authorised and socially fashionable, we have seen the traces, more or less distinct, of a formal Christianity; and what is a formal Christianity but a Christianity in which creed and life, faith and charity, have no vital connection? We all believe, in theory, that we ought to love our enemies; and yet how ready are many of us to think and speak unkindly even of our friends! We all believe that the poor are blessed, and that we cannot serve both God and Mammon; and yet how eagerly will many of us barter for a few grains of gold the strength of our manhood and the beauty of our days! We all believe that unless we are willing, forsaking everything that He may ask, to take up the Cross and follow Him,

we cannot be His disciples; and yet how poor, how mean, how contemptible is the sacrifice which most of us have made for Him! All of us are examples, in some measure, of this kind of breach between faith and charity; and all of us need to remind ourselves of that warning voice, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them!"

But in some cases the disconnection is complete. There are those who, while professing the Christian faith, are plainly seen to owe whatever goodness may be in them, not to their personal religion, but to their education and position and the influence of social opinion and habit. It is impossible to find (and they themselves, with some worldly or sophistical excuse, will often confess it) that their theoretical faith has any direct result on the charity of their daily life. In what sense, you may ask,

are they better, then, than the Pharisee, so bitterly rebuked by Christ? They are not only not better than he in any way, they are infinitely worse—worse, in that they profess to have the light, and make no attempt to walk by it: worse, infinitely worse, in that the greater belief must always and of necessity involve the greater obligation. “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.”

It is such facts as these that help us to understand in what sense it is possible to separate creed and conduct, to have charity without faith or faith without charity. And thus we are free to affirm once more our conclusion, that an unreal Christianity is a less high, a less noble thing than a truly charitable unbelief. When we remember the savage persecutions of the past; when we remember, even in our own day, the cruel intolerance of party against party, sect

against sect, Church against Church, on purely intellectual grounds; when we consider how much swifter men have been to attack the sceptic for his want of belief than the Christian for his insincere and formal life: we begin to perceive that this great truth of charity before faith has not taken the place it ought to have occupied in the progress of religious thought.

Charity without faith—that is better than faith without charity; but better, of course, than either is charity with faith. We do not and we cannot suppose that creeds are matters of indifference. In the largest sense, conduct is ruled by creed; and the ideal of religion is, and must always be, a perfect faith issuing in a perfect life. The Christ who helps us to aim at this ideal will help us also, as far as possible, to forget our intellectual differences with others, and to make common cause with them in fighting

against those giant evils that everywhere beset us. It is hard to pierce the dark clouds that hang over modern life ; yet we cannot but feel that the future influence of Christianity will largely depend upon the power it shows, while loyal to all that is essential to itself, of approving and helping good work wherever it be found. It is easier for ' the Christian to do this if he remembers, as he should, that all good is a conscious or unconscious tribute to his Master Christ, and to that " Father of lights from whom cometh down every good gift and every perfect gift." " Good must needs come "—so runs Christ's unwritten word—" but blessed is that man through whom it comes."

VI

THE HEAVENLY VISION

“I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.”

—ACTS xxvi. 19.

TO the critic of the Christian religion there has always been one insuperable difficulty. That difficulty is St. Paul. Wherever the critic goes, and however successful he may find or fancy himself elsewhere in explaining and analysing, that strange, heroic figure stands before him on every path. How came St. Paul to be converted? How came this learned and dogmatic Pharisee to be the most devoted champion of a despised and rejected Christ? No adequate answer has ever been found to those questions, save the answer of St. Paul himself: that

in one way or another he had seen a "heavenly vision," and had not been "disobedient" to the call. The only refuge for the critic has been in the theory (no new one, for it is suggested by Festus in the very chapter before us) that St. Paul was mad. Now, all men who have been pre-eminent for goodness have been regarded by the world as mad at some point of their career ; but if we examine the life and writings of this particular Apostle, do we find any facts to support such a theory? We see a man who travelled, perhaps, farther through the world than any other man of his day ; a man who, in danger and disaster by land or sea, evinced great tact and insight and power of judgment ; a man whose organising capacity can only have been equalled by his spiritual genius ; a man who, throughout the extraordinary complications of a uniquely difficult and

laborious career, was not only bold and resolute, but in the highest degree prudent, practical, and business-like. These qualities appear also in his letters. The earliest of the Christian writings, let us remember, were not the Gospels, but certain of St. Paul's Epistles. Long before any of our Gospels were composed, these letters were written and despatched; and yet in these, the earliest, and, as one might fairly have supposed, the freshest and wildest utterances of Christian enthusiasm, we find exactly the same sweet reasonableness and sound judgment which distinguish the writer's life. The critical theory utterly breaks down. There is not a shadow of evidence that St. Paul was in any way deluded. If he were mad, it was only with that true and noble madness to which all of us might well aspire; and for my part, I had rather be mad with the madness of St. Paul

than sane with the sanity of his modern critics.

“I was not disobedient,” he says, “unto the heavenly vision.” St. Paul is speaking of an experience which has come, in some form or other, to all great and good men—the dream, the vision, the sudden illuminating conviction of a Divine strength and a Divine consolation—the sense of a finger pointing and of a voice calling upward to a higher life, “This is the way, walk ye in it !” Those moments of light and inspiration will be found, sometimes in strange shapes, in the life of every great prophet or reformer. All the leading men of Old Testament history—Jacob, Elijah, Isaiah, Ezekiel—had some experience similar to St. Paul’s: Jacob when he wrestled on Peniel with that mysterious Presence, and would not let it go until it had blessed him with a new name, a new and serious thought of life and its deep, deep meaning; Elijah when, from

the darkness of his lonely cave amid the mountains, he heard a still, small voice, and was comforted; Isaiah when he saw the Lord sitting enthroned in His temple, and felt the angel lay upon his lips the live coal taken from the burning altar; Ezekiel when, as he sat captive by the river of Chebar, the heavens were opened upon him, and he saw visions of God—the four cherubim coming out of the whirlwind, and the glory of the sapphire throne.

And these high moments came to these men, as they came in a later day to St. Peter or St. Paul, not as the passing splendour of an imaginative dream, but as a real teaching, a real and practical and fruitful inspiration. They all recognised in these visions, in whatever form they may have come, true messengers from God—messengers to help them to look more deeply into the secret of life, and to reach a purer and larger knowledge of God

and man, and of man's duty on this earth. They all felt that these were by far the best, the most precious, moments in their brief and flying hours ; and that no patience, no watchfulness, no discipline could be too great that made them ready to look and listen. And thus it was that, when the Divine summons really came at last, they had the courage, "not disobedient unto the heavenly vision," to look up and answer, in Isaiah's words, "Here am I: send me!"

"But," somebody may suggest, "these great men and their visions make, indeed, an attractive picture and a fascinating subject of thought, but what have they to do with me?" Everything, I reply. These golden moments of inspiration and encouragement are what we all can and ought to watch for. Dull indeed, or very depraved, is the life that never knows them. Even the most apparently commonplace career is often lightened by them,

unknown to men ; and many are the channels through which God sends them into the twilight in which we move. Sometimes they come through the conversation of a friend, sometimes through the appeal of a noble life ; now it is the voice of conscience that brings them, now it is the pathos or terror of some passing event ; or, again, we receive them from a poet's art, or from a wandering melody, or even from a purple blossom of the woods. There is no mysticism, no idle dreaming here : men have been strangely guided by such things ere now ; they are strangely guided by them to-day. Doubtless we are the creatures of a mood : true, but then it is the higher moods that we have to seek, and these are some of the ways in which we find them.

And then, according to their different temperaments, men are differently helped. One has the vision of Purity : he sees himself,

through youth and manhood, keeping his soul sacred from the touch of defilement, and wearing "the white flower of a blameless life." Another has the vision of Charity: the voice of the world's misery cries aloud to him, and he sees himself helping the suffering and giving strength to the weak. Another has the vision of Truth: like Newton, he is "voyaging through strange seas of thought alone," and wresting from Nature some great truth as yet hidden from the eyes of men. And a fourth receives the vision of God: and while others are crowding the broad and beaten tracks of frivolity or Mammon-worship or open vice, he sees stretched before himself the strait and narrow and lonely way of holiness, with Jesus of Nazareth to guide his steps. It is these thoughts, believe me, it is these ideals or the want of them, which make men what they are; these which give to nations and to individuals alike the possibility

of progress ; these, therefore, for which we must earnestly seek to keep the seeing eye and the wakeful mind, even in the days of which it is most surely true that "the young men shall see visions, and the old men shall dream dreams."

The seeing eye and the wakeful mind ! Yes, for how easily, how quickly, can the one be darkened and the other lulled into a torpid slumber ! There are, in this respect, three great tendencies in our national character against which we, as Englishmen, should do well to be upon our guard — our practical temperament, our critical spirit, our love of money.

Our practical temperament in itself is good. We owe to its strength and persistence our fine achievements in the field of action, the vastness of our commerce, the greatness and solidity of our empire. Nor can one altogether deny the gift of imagination to a people whose

national poet is also the foremost poet of the world. Yet, on the other hand, that imagination has not taken its full place in English life is proved by many facts: by the fact, for example, that no great musician or painter (that is, no musician or painter of the first rank), has ever been produced on English soil. And can we regard our practical character as an unqualified good if, in the hot competition and busy turmoil of life, men do not find some moments for quiet meditation on the eternal mysteries, some moments of listening for the still, small voice, which cannot be heard until the earthquake, and the wind, and the fire have ceased!

The critical temper, too, has done some good; but also, especially in its modern garb of cynicism, infinite harm. Cynicism is thought by some to be synonymous with cleverness: you may take it rather to be an incomparable folly. The spirit of perpetual

criticism is the frost of life: where it is found, no flower will blossom, or even keep its bloom; and where it is long indulged, the critic hardens and ultimately kills in himself that childlike spirit without which no heaven, here or hereafter, is opened unto men.

And finally, there is the love of money—"the root," as an apostle calls it, "of all evil";¹ certainly the blight of noble endeavour and pure emotion, the curse of our mortality, the last supreme madness of a creature fashioned of old after the likeness of God.

To watch, to hear, and to *obey*: all these things are required of us if we would shape our life after its true pattern. Without that obedience, of which St. Paul is speaking, these heavenly visions, these higher moods and better moments, will become merely idle

¹ More accurately, "*a* root of all kinds of evils."

and ineffectual, and "pass into nothingness." But if we obey them, if we have the courage, like him, to follow their guidance, we shall learn that God has indeed a message even for ourselves. We shall find that these visions do indeed, as Wordsworth said,

"Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal silence."

We shall begin in some measure to understand, perhaps even to share, the self-consecrating spirit of Him who, as He stood, at the beginning of His life-work, on the banks of Jordan and received the baptism of John, looked up with faith and love into the opening heavens, and heard a voice saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The same words may be heard to-day by any man who dares to walk with Him.

VII

THE HAPPINESS OF SERVICE

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”—ACTS xx. 35.

IN the pages of early Christian literature are enshrined certain unwritten sayings of our Lord, not anywhere recorded in the New Testament. Some of these—and the whole number of them is not large—are supported by poor authority, or in themselves ring false or doubtful to the ear. Others are upheld by such great names as those of Origen or Clement of Alexandria, and carry the almost certain stamp of the Master's hand. “He that is near Me is near the fire”; “Good must needs come, but blessed is that man through whom it comes”;

"Show yourselves tried money-changers"; "He that wonders shall reign, and he that reigns shall rest"—these are among the sayings which, we can hardly doubt, were genuine utterances of Christ.

Intermediate between such traditional words and the actual records of the Evangelists comes one saying, and one only—the saying which St. Paul here quotes and makes his own: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It stands inside the New Testament and yet outside the Gospels. Thoroughly in keeping as it is with the tenor of Christ's teaching, there is yet no passage to which we can definitely refer it, no text which it even recalls. We know that the words were His who spoke as never man spake before, not only because they have the witness of St. Paul, but also because they possess the old, inimitable beauty, and are instinct with the very spirit of His life. What we do not know is the

occasion on which they were spoken or the circumstances which called them forth. From the tense of the Greek verb here used, we gather that this was no repeated saying of Christ's—possibly for that reason omitted from the Gospels—but a definite utterance belonging to some special occasion; but when or why it was spoken we cannot tell. Borne to us, it may be, from the dews of Hermon, or from the grey olive groves of Gethsemane, or from the shores of the blue Galilean lake, this thrilling voice touches us not only with a peculiar pathos, as it recalls the sacrifice of Him who uttered it, but also, in view of the characteristics of modern life, with almost a sense of irony. In days when men are absorbed in the passionate scramble for wealth and honour; when judgment passes on a man rather by what he is worth than by the worth that is in him; when we plot and scheme for preferment, and win the con-

gratulations, where too often we deserve the condolences, of our friends; when we dare not be unpopular for the sake of right, nor speak a word that may damage the prospects of our own advancement, but face two ways like Seneca, anxious "to stand well with Truth, and yet not ill with Nero"—is there not something moving in the quiet paradox of that voice? "Yes!" it seems to say to man; "you labour for the rewards and riches of this world. For those you spend yourself; for those you are prepared to live in jealousy and bitterness and tears. Poor thing! Do you not know that it is all an error—a pitiful mistake? What you gain here, you will lose there; and whether you gain or lose, it is still and always more blessed to give than to receive."

1. Here, then, is the most general, and, we may say, the *negative* application of our text. The Rabbinical law required that every Jew

should be taught a trade. St. Paul, therefore, being able to support himself by his own labour, did not ask for material reward, and was free to turn the main stream of his energy into the channel of service. His life is our assurance that true happiness does not lie in anything outside the man. It has been the common aim of every pure religion, and of every great teacher in the world, to undermine practical materialism, and to warn us that only in the soul itself is the secret of content. It may be questioned whether we have learnt the lesson. We still catch at the imaginary delights with which life tries to cheat us; we still dream of a happiness which, if not now, can never be ours; we still find something paradoxical in St. Paul's saying, though it is, in fact, as simply true as the converse saying of Socrates, that he who commits an injustice does harm only to himself. It

is a simple truth, verified by common experience, and, like every fundamental truth of Christianity, rooted in a psychological law. Imagine a man, comparatively poor and friendless, inheriting or gradually winning a magnificent estate. Does he add to his *pleasure* in life? Alas! he adds absolutely nothing. His conservatories with their wealth of flowers will never charm him more than "the yellow primrose" which was the passion of his youth; the great library with its store of books will never give him the exquisite relish of those few tattered volumes which first stirred his intellectual thirst. He may have added to his opportunities of pleasure; he may have changed the objects of his pleasure; he may have found roads to new pleasures, once unknown; but his *capacity* for pleasure he cannot change. That is a constant force. It is the same, though in another sphere. What he gains here, he

loses there. In everything there is compensation. He wins a high position—good; but then, with the position comes a responsibility from which he was free before. He attains great wealth; but wealth also has its responsibilities. The higher he rises, the more delicate and difficult, as a rule, his work becomes; and while he secures more honour, he rarely wins more peace.

Quite apart, therefore, from the deteriorating influence on character which the direct search for those things must inevitably bring with it, it is (even from the seeker's point of view) a useless and an unprofitable task. If a man has what we may justly require as the necessities of life—that is, food and raiment, and a fair opportunity for culture in the largest sense; if, in other words, there is nothing to hinder him from a complete self-realisation; then he has everything that the world can give him in

the way of happiness. Over and above that, God may call him to high service in this or that position; but if, from such gifts of God, he looks for an addition to his own happiness, he has but to await the schooling of experience to find out his mistake.

2. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The other and more special application of the words is suggested to us by the special circumstances of our times.

The whole drift of modern thought, by the accumulated force of many tendencies, goes to bring into prominence the social side of Christ's teaching. Many of us still believe that absolute equality among men is neither possible nor desirable; nobody denies that there are gross inequalities among us which ought not to be tolerated. From high to low, we all recognise them; we all deplore them; we all earnestly desire that they may be somehow reduced. It is certain

that no really civilised community could possibly present the extreme contrasts of wealth and poverty, of toil and idleness, which we see in this country to-day. The question is, granting (as we do) the existence of a social problem, how it is to be solved?

And here we may remark what is, perhaps, the great distinction between Christianity and many at least of the schemes of modern Socialism. Both wish to reduce inequalities; but their methods are different. Socialism too often says, *Take!* Christianity wishes rather to *give*. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." There, if anywhere, and in the *moral* training which Christianity alone can perfectly supply, will be found the solution of our difficulties. Absolute equality of goods was, as we know, tried in the primitive Church, and even then the plan was no success. A deeper insight and

a fuller experience have shown us that the true aim of Christ was rather to secure that every man may have a fair chance in life, and may receive the just reward of his own work. Towards that simple end every Christian, as such, is pledged to make his contribution. It is not the duty of one who tries to speak in the name of Christ to advocate definite schemes of social reform; it *is* very sternly his duty—and woe to himself if he fail to recognise it!—to implore most earnestly any who will hear his words to do something by serious example, if not by active devotion, for those who labour and are heavy-laden; to beg them to show, in greater measure than many of us do, sympathy for the sufferings, and consideration for the feelings, of those in a lower station than themselves; and above all, to remind them that such humanity and service are not merely the natural, but the *necessary*,

outcome of the principles of Christ. For in what is a man better than "a pagan suckled in a creed outworn," if his creed helps him, in the circle of his own life, to be just and honourable and upright, and yet does not help him to be merciful to those for whom Christ died?

There are, as a recent writer has wisely suggested, two great classes in the community which could, if they would, best help us in this matter. One class consists of "the younger really intellectual men in our higher families," who have now "a rare chance of becoming, in the truest sense, popular leaders. What might not such men do if they chose to master the facts at first-hand, and devote themselves avowedly to be champions of the poor? Apart from the inspiring thought of the great movement they could thus lead—for lead they surely would—would it not be worth something to come out from amongst

the mediocrities and leave a mark on human life?" And the other class consists of the best and most thoughtful women in the best English society. "There are plenty of able women, with heart, influence, and courage, if some Savonarola could but find his way to their intellects and consciences, to take up in grim earnest the social condition of their fellows." Let all such "forego mere social and political pressure on either side, and inspire their sons and brothers to be true Red-Cross knights; let them be thus the Unas of a new chivalry, which shall do battle for the socially weak. It is well known that some are so doing; but we want not an exceptional devotion, but a prevailing type of opinion and tone; we want not a slumming excitement, but a lifelong interest, a re-inspiration of the old words *Noblesse oblige*."

And indeed, when one regards the occupations and ambitions with which many of

our women seem to be satisfied, there appears to be no more appalling fact in modern life than the waste of the splendid powers of English womanhood. That, if anything, in the face of our social distress, might lead one to despair. And yet, if women ask, as many of them do, for a fresh outlet for their energy, where can they find a nobler one than here? Here is a field wide enough for the most ambitious—a field which seems specially to belong to them. Dare we say that, because they have not yet done all they might in it, therefore on them falls very largely the responsibility for that distress? One, at least, of our great modern teachers *has* dared to say so—not, he adds, because they have provoked, but because they have not hindered. Addressing the women of England, doubtless with a touch of his customary exaggeration, but still with a very serious truth, Mr. Ruskin says: "There

is no suffering, no injustice, no misery in the earth, but the guilt of it lies with you. Men can bear the sight of it, but you should not be able to bear it. Men may tread it down without sympathy in their own struggle; but men are feeble in sympathy and contracted in hope; it is you only who can feel the depths of pain, and conceive the way of its healing. Instead of trying to do this, you turn away from it; you shut yourselves within your park walls and garden gates; and you are content to know that there is beyond them a whole world in wilderness—a world of secrets which you dare not penetrate, and of sufferings which you dare not conceive."

A whole world in wilderness! Yes, if St. Paul, from the very different circumstances of his own time and country, could have looked forward to our day, as by the bright waters of the Ægean Sea he bade farewell

to the elders of Miletus, and left them, never to return, with how redoubled an emphasis would he have repeated the saying of his Lord, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." And yet, even now, if we would live with but a measure of the spirit of that saying, the spirit of St. Paul's and of his Master's life, how quickly should we see among us the first faint outlines of the Kingdom of God, the City whose foundation is Christ, and the gleaming circlet of whose walls is made fast as adamant by the ministration of the sons of men! To prepare the way for the coming of that King, to be fellow-workers for that New Jerusalem, is at once the duty and the privilege of us all.

VIII

CHRISTIAN INDEPENDENCE

“Ye are bought with a price : be not ye the servants of men.”—I COR. vii. 23.

A REMARKABLE story has come down to us concerning that famous “Last Supper” of Leonardo da Vinci, now mouldering away on the old monastery wall at Milan. It is said that the great painter, copying the faces of his Apostles from those of good men whom he knew, had a long and difficult search for some face which might fitly be studied for the face of his Christ. At last he happened to meet with one Pietro Bandinelli, a choir-boy of exquisite voice belonging to the Cathedral; and struck by the beautiful features and reverent manner that

spoke of a blameless life, he induced him to lend his face to the picture. Some years passed by, and the great work was all finished, with the exception of the face of Judas. Again the painter was in difficulty as he paced the streets of Milan in search of a man whose look and expression might serve him for the traitor; but again his search was rewarded, and the picture at last was done. As he dismissed the miserable and degraded creature who had been his awful choice, the man looked up at him and said, "You have painted me before." It was the same Pietro. During those intervening years he had gone to study music at Rome, had met with evil companions, had given himself up to drinking and gambling, had fallen into dissipation and crime. The face which was now the face of Judas had once been the face of Christ.

However far the story may be true, it is

in many ways suggestive. Above all, it seems to mark, with something of the vividness of reality, the same contrast which St. Paul is here drawing between the servant of Christ and the servant of men—between one who is “bought with a price,” the slave, therefore, of another and no longer his own master, and one who is in bondage to the follies and fashions of the world. Not that St. Paul means us necessarily to attach the worst and darkest meaning to this phrase, “the servants of men.” The theme on which he is writing is that of Christian independence. He is answering the question which had puzzled the Corinthians as to how far religion is compatible with the varied circumstances of men’s lives, and particularly with the fact of slavery. St. Paul’s view is that Christianity lifts men above social distinctions of every sort. A truly Christian life is possible under all conditions and in every calling.

If a slave is offered liberty, he should accept the offer, because it is better for all men to be free; but otherwise, "Let every man abide," he says, "in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called, being a servant? Care not for it." "Care not for it," he means, because you can be as real a Christian in slavery—under all the heavy and uncongenial tasks imposed upon you—as you could elsewhere. Yours is a spiritual independence. You have risen superior to circumstance. You are bought by Christ: therefore you are His, and His alone. But therefore also, he adds, in words that are not contradictory except in form, "be not ye the servants of men." Suffer no man to interfere with your service to Christ. Slaves as you may be in a literal sense, be not slaves in a spiritual sense. Exercise your Christian independence. Christianity means spiritual freedom: be Christian, and you are free.

Independence—it is a rare quality, a quality which Englishmen greatly honour, and which they seldom possess. And this large phrase of St. Paul's does not refer simply to positively vicious habits into which men may be drawn; he is warning us to stand in an attitude of independence towards all those intellectual and social habits and customs and traditions which may easily narrow, if they do not seriously injure, the soul.

1. It is above all in the sphere of truth that the Christian will seek to be independent. Partial views are, perhaps, a necessary infirmity of minds, however noble. Possibly the human intellect is so constructed that no man can attain to more than a partial view of any subject, political or religious. Yet we venture to think that the temper in which a man holds and expresses his opinions is quite as important as the kind of opinions he holds; and, therefore, that if we are prone

to become "the servants of men" by falling into a spirit of partisanship, it is just that spirit against which we have most to guard. Partial views need not plunge us into such bitterness and uncharitableness that we cannot speak a good word of those who have been brought to other conclusions than ourselves with regard to political or ecclesiastical questions on which the wisest have found reason to differ. Partial views need not draw us so far from humility that we can look round and believe that God's universe contains no fragment of truth which has not been revealed to us. And yet how ready we are to criticise and cavil at others, to slur over their virtues and emphasise their faults, just *because* of an intellectual difference! How ready we are to sit complacently by our own tiny pool of knowledge—round which in five minutes a man may walk—and fancy it the mirror of the world;

and never dream that yonder on the far horizon, if we had but the eye to look and the ear to listen, there is the foam and the salt breath of the illimitable sea!

2. Nor ought the Christian to be less watchfully independent in matters of social custom and social requirement. In many points, no doubt, the Christian will conform to the ways of society; partly because those ways are largely innocent or indifferent, partly because society could not exist at all without some degree of conformity. But how quickly it happens that the thoughtful man or woman, trying to look into the traditional and customary, the common acts and common modes of thought which make up so large a part of life, and trying to measure them all by a really Christian standard, is brought to a pause; is compelled to ask, of some practice perhaps so usual that it calls for no comment, "Is this thing right?"

In one of his Dialogues, Leopardi, the Italian pessimist, speaks of Fashion as "the sister of Death"; and certainly he is so far right that, wholesome and profitable as it is for us to have matters of real indifference settled for us by social custom, yet there is something so narrowing and soul-destroying in the pursuit of fashion for fashion's sake, whether it be in little things or in great—in dress or recreation, or study or education, or artistic or literary production, or in religion itself—that neither mind nor character can be truly developed in it or remain long uninjured. To arrange your surroundings and conduct and manner of life according to the fashion of the hour; to be and to do things just because you suppose that others will expect it of you, irrespective of true beauty, utility, or justice—is perhaps the only completely mean and wretched form of slavery that is to be found on the face of the earth.

But our chief quarrel with Fashion is this: not that social customs are bad in themselves (though they are very often that), but that, under pretence of being innocent and harmless, they draw us away from what is *best*. If we become "the servants of men" through our failure to cultivate a wise spirit of Christian independence, are we not as the blind led by the blind? Society may expect you to spend fifty pounds a year on dress; but, if you can manage with ten pounds or with five, and make a better use of the rest, clearly it becomes your duty to do so. Society may expect you to occupy a large house; but if you can do better work for the world by living in an attic, in an attic you are bound to live. Society may expect you to give up four or five nights in the week to visiting your friends; but if you can employ to wiser purpose some of those hours taken from a flying life, no power should

draw you across your threshold. The Christian, you see, can no longer be satisfied with the question of what is *right*: he has also to ask what is *best*—the best and highest possible for himself and others. Is this thing, sanctioned by the world, the best that I can do? Is this the thing that Christ Himself would have said and done if placed in circumstances like mine? Is this the thing best fitted to the simplicity of the Christian life? Is this the thing that will best bear looking into under the lightnings of the Cross?

“Ye are bought with a price: be not ye the servants of men.” Such, then, is the true character of Christian independence—independence towards men, *because* dependence upon God. The second part of St. Paul’s great saying is a necessary consequence of the first. In the spiritual world the Christian is a servant—one “bought
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with a price"; in the practical world he is a king—a king able, humbly but in boldness, not from a desire for originality, but in obedience to a higher Lord, to choose what is best; to pursue his own course, to follow his own will, whatever the world may do or say. In the redemption and service of the Cross lies the refuge from the slavery of the world. "The love of Christ," so run the impassioned words in which St. Paul elsewhere enforces this same lesson on the Corinthian Church—"The love of Christ constraineth us: because we thus judge, that, if One died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them and rose again. . . . Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new."

IX

LIFE A TRUST

“Ye are not your own.”—I COR. vi. 19.

THERE are two ways, and two only, in which any man may regard the transitory life which he is at this moment living. It may be to him a *possession*, or it may be a *trust*. It may be a thing which he can use as he likes, to his own profit and advantage; or it may be a thing which he must spend, and treasure, and lay out according to the will of another. There are some noble words of the Stoic Epictetus in which the second of these views is set forth. “Never say of anything, I have lost it: say, I have given it back. Is thy child

dead? It has been given back. Is thy wife dead? She has been given back. Has thine estate been taken from thee? That also has been given back. And if thou sayest, He that took it from me is an evil man: what matters it to thee whose were the hands through which the Giver asked it back?"

We need hardly remind ourselves, in theory at any rate, what is the Christian view of this matter. Christianity regards every man as a steward or trustee; and his life, and all that belongs to it, and everything that he has, as so many talents which God has placed under his charge, and for which hereafter—and indeed, in a very real sense, now, and every day and every moment that he lives—he has to render an account.

The spirit of St. Paul is everywhere penetrated by this great thought. He conceives of life as a stewardship: "It is required in

stewards that a man be found faithful." For himself, he lives entirely at the disposal of God. "Paul, the slave of Jesus Christ," he calls himself; and again, as if his very personality had disappeared, "To me to live is Christ"; and again, in words which represent the constant temper of all his thinking and acting, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Everywhere St. Paul is loyal to the great tradition of the Apostolic Church, which permits a man to acquire and possess property and wealth, but does not permit him to make use of it as if it were his own. "Neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own;" for all realised the truth of the message afterwards delivered to the Church at Rome, "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, there-

fore, or die, we are the Lord's." And this thought of life as a trust from God found an easy entrance into the heart of the early Christians, because they had perpetually before them the example of One whose thought, in the highest sense, it had always been. From Bethlehem to Calvary His life had been the simple expression of His Father's will. "My meat," He said, "is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work"; and again, "The Son can do nothing of Himself"; and again, "Not My will but Thine be done." Of Him it is supremely true that, in word and act and thought and purpose, He stands for ever first of those to whom life and its belongings mean only a great responsibility, and who have so lived as if this were their one law and inspiration, "Ye are not your own."

"Ye are not your own." I said just now

that we need hardly remind ourselves of the Christian view of the stewardship of life. But this is far from being the case. We need, in fact, to remind ourselves of it continually, as of a truth which we know perfectly well and seldom put into practice. It has been remarked, and with justice, that "no fact emphasises so strikingly the divergence of the Church of the nineteenth from that of the first century as the complacency with which to-day the rich man claims for his wealth, the poor man for his labour, the artist for his genius, and the mechanic for his skill, an absolute right of private ownership, the right to use or to withhold the gifts of God when and as the individual pleases." And this is more or less true of us all. In theory we should no doubt say that what we have is not our own; but how far—this is the vital question—how far does our daily conduct correspond with our belief? You

have given, we will suppose, a certain sum of money to a charitable institution, and you are just a little inclined to pride yourself on your generous disposition. Well, how can you be generous with what is confessedly not your own? If your housekeeper at your request gives a shilling to the beggar at your doors, you hardly expect her to take credit for her generosity. Or, we will suppose, you are spending on yourself, on your own pleasure and comfort, nine-tenths of the income which God has entrusted to you, and nine-tenths of the time which He permits you to live. No doubt you would be surprised and annoyed if I were to tell you that you are a thief. But I tell you more than that. I say that you are robbing God as well as man; and I ask you what would be your own opinion of the banker who, receiving at your hands a deposit of a thousand pounds, was found to have forthwith spent nine hun-

dred on himself? Yet it is this very image of banking which Christ Himself applied to human life. "Show yourselves," He said, in words which, though they do not occur in the pages of the New Testament, have the witness of some of the later Christian writers as being among the most certainly genuine of His unrecorded words—"Show yourselves tried bankers": men, that is, who may rightly be charged with the great trust of life, and who will care for it and use it as God would have it cared for and used. The phrase recalls to us the parable of the talents, the parable of the ten virgins, and much else of a similar nature in the teaching of Christ; and, in the scope and spirit of it, the metaphor is essentially the same as that of the steward, used more than once by Christ Himself, and afterwards by St. Paul.

What, then, is the one essential requirement of stewardship? "Certainly not great

ability on the part of the person who has the office. Certainly not the greatness or the smallness of the trusts put into his care. One quality only is an absolute requisite of stewardship. It is required in stewards that a man be found *faithful*. And to be found faithful, the steward is bound first and always to recognise the fact that what he has, what he spends, and what he uses, belongs not to him, but to the master in whose employ he is. The absolute nature of his master's claim admits of no qualifying terms. He has in his possession the things which belong to his master. It is his first care, his only care, not only that those material things which have been put into his keeping shall be so used as eventually to further his master's interests, but that his time, his talents, the full powers of his body and mind, all of which belong to his master, shall also be so used and exerted."

Apply this simple truth to your own life—to all your gifts and faculties, your time and wealth and influence and opportunity—and you will see how pressing, how far-reaching is the claim which Christ makes upon the human soul. Those leisure hours which we are so ready to waste in frivolous occupations or sheer idleness are given us only on the condition that they are put to some worthy employment. Those mental gifts which we are so ready to soil and weaken in the study of vulgar or debasing literature were meant to be trained and purified for God's own definite purposes. That money which we spend so lavishly on ourselves, so reluctantly on others, is but lent to us, every penny of it, as a sacred trust. In all these things—in everything that we have, in everything that we are—we may hear, if we choose to listen, the challenge of St. Paul—"Ye are not your own."

I ask you, then, to pay earnest heed to this Christian conception of what life involves. It is a simple conception ; yet it is one of those which, if really grasped, may change completely the whole colour and tendency of a life. For mark what follows. Not only do we owe God an account of everything that He has given us, but the more we have the greater our responsibility becomes. "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." The steward who is charged with the care of a large property is in a more responsible position than he whose trust is a light one ; and the larger our own possessions—whether those possessions be the outward ones of prosperity and rank, or the inward ones of intellectual and spiritual gifts—the greater is our responsibility to God. To the poor, the weak, the ignorant, the helpless, He may well be lenient, and ask of them

little in return ; but what of the rich, the clever, the powerful, the successful ? Of them, we may be certain, in proportion to that which they have received will be that which will be required. The rich man may thus become, in exact proportion to his riches, the object of our sympathy and compassion. Whatever his wealth, he dare not spend upon himself more than justice requires and charity permits ; and, outside the narrow limits of that personal expenditure, there remains the great bulk of the money of which God has made him a trustee, involving on him the constant responsibility and the anxious thought of its right use and distribution ; while, as Shakespeare said,

“ He bears his heavy riches but a journey,
And death unloads him.”

So that, in many cases, the question may easily present itself to us, where the choice is ours : What shall I do ? Shall I take

the larger possessions *and* the larger responsibility; or, free from the added responsibility, shall I be content with what I have? Whatever, in such a case, our choice may be, may we at least remember, under all the varied circumstances of our changeful life, that we are "not our own"; and may we so live as men who have not quite forgotten the final hour, now drawing on for us all, when once more that voice shall sound to each of us out of the eternal silence: "Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward."

X

LAWFULNESS AND EXPEDIENCY

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient.”—I COR. x. 23.

THESE words may fairly be taken as a Pauline rule of life. The Apostle himself regards it as of such importance that he repeats it more than once to the people of Corinth; and you will accordingly find it in the sixth chapter of this letter, as well as in the tenth; the only difference being that the words “*for me*,” which occur in the sixth chapter, do not occur in the tenth, and are rightly omitted in the Revised Version. The difference is not important, but it may serve to emphasise the fact that St. Paul’s maxim is applicable to all Christians,

and not merely to himself. The soul of Christianity is, as we know, positive ; it tells us rather what we ought to do than what we ought not to do ; and the whole force and inspiration of its genius goes not so much to the avoidance of evil as to the pursuit and struggle after truth and goodness. Still, negative rules are often of value ; and in this maxim of St. Paul we may find an injunction which, rightly understood, will carry us many steps upward in the higher life.

“ All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient.” The Corinthian Church was, for the moment, confronted by a somewhat perplexing problem. Corinth was a centre of heathen worship : how was a society which definitely rejected all belief in the gods of Greece to behave towards the sacrifices and ceremonies with which the life of the city was still bound up ? Supposing a

Christian convert was asked to dinner by an unconverted friend, he might very easily be offered food which had come into the market from the sacrifices of the idolatrous Greek worship: was he to eat of it, or was he not?

Now it is the tendency of every great spiritual movement, especially in its earlier stages, to run to an extreme; and, in their violent reaction against the narrow restrictions of Judaism, the Christians of Corinth may have laid too much stress on the liberty and independence of the Christian life. "We may eat anything we will; observances and limitations are fit only for the Jew, and are entirely done away with by Christ; all things are lawful"—that, it would appear, was the opinion of some prominent members of the Church. But St. Paul is of another mind. All things are lawful—that he is willing to admit. But he wishes a distinc-

tion to be made. If nothing is said to the invited guest about idol or sacrifice, he may eat freely of anything; for, as he knows that the Greek gods have no existence, he knows also that the whole of the sacrificial system is a childish farce; and therefore, so far as the absolute right or wrong of the matter is concerned, he can clearly eat or not as he chooses. But supposing that his friend deliberately tells him that certain meat has been offered to idols, not understanding Christian liberty, and perhaps hoping to draw him away from his allegiance to Christ; or supposing that another Christian is present, not so large-minded as himself, who would be shocked at his eating, or perhaps be tempted to follow his example and eat, feeling all the time that he was doing wrong—then the question of lawfulness gives place to the question of expediency. “Is it *best*, does it contribute most to the great cause of

Christianity, that I should do this thing? May I do what I know to be, in itself, perfectly innocent, at the risk of hurting another's feelings, and possibly of leading him astray?" And strongly as St. Paul held the doctrine of Christian liberty, this was his noble answer: "No! If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend!"

It was, no doubt, an old-world question which thus troubled the Church of Corinth; but questions of conscience never lose their force, but only put on a new shape for their reappearance on the stage of history. Modern Christianity has problems for all of us very similar to this which St. Paul decides; and his maxim, "All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient," was never more necessary than now.

It is not easy to combine large-minded-

ness and common-sense with tenderness for the feelings of others, respect for their convictions, toleration even of their prejudices. Few days pass when a sincere Christian has not some practical difficulty to solve, touching, it may be, matters of temperance, of personal expenditure, of the observance of Sunday, of ways of recreation or amusement, when he has anxiously to ask himself not merely what is lawful but also what is expedient. It is probable that we are more tempted than we know to insist so much on lawfulness that we neglect expediency. We emphasise (for that is what it comes to) our own *rights* more than our *duty* to others. We are well aware that many things are perfectly right and innocent, which other people (whom we clearly see to be narrow, foolish, prejudiced, or simple-minded) dislike or object to. We do not care or trouble to inquire into the very complex and subtle in-

fluences of our own acts and habits. Instead of following the steep path which leads from the better to the best, we are too often content if we can skilfully balance ourselves on the sharp line that separates the wrong from the not-wrong. If a particular indulgence does us no manifest moral harm, we do not much care to ask whether somebody else may be harmed by our example. "It is obviously not wrong," we say, for instance, "to give or to go to dinner-parties on Sunday"; but whether the practice is *expedient* or not — whether it conduces, on the whole, to the good of the Church, the progress of society, and the welfare of *all* the classes of which society is composed — this, Christians as we call ourselves, we are not greatly troubled about. I am not here saying that any particular practice is inexpedient; I am only pointing out that we are, as a rule, too indifferent as

to whether our actions are expedient or not.

Such a mood is, at any rate, too common among us; and it is one for which St. Paul would have reserved a decisive rebuke. "When ye sin so against the brethren," he exclaims (by your carelessness and indifference), "ye sin against Christ." The whole question of modern luxury and comfort seems to be covered by this maxim. The Christian may, no doubt, lawfully enjoy all the good things of life. Health and wealth and happiness, we say, are gifts of God; we are meant to enjoy and to be thankful for them; the spiritual life is independent of its material surroundings; we may be good Christians wherever we are. True, all things are lawful; but the question does not end there. "Think," St. Paul would say, "of what you are doing, and the far-reaching quality of your acts. Remember your duty of example

as well as your right of enjoyment. There is a whole world, ignorant, perhaps, and narrow and uninstructed, waiting to see what your profession of Christianity means. There is a whole world ready to be drawn or repelled, to be influenced for good or ill, by what you do. You bear the proudest of all titles, the name of Christian; you are the disciple of a homeless and crucified Christ; you are pledged, in His name, to simplicity and self-denial. Is it, then, *expedient*, is it the best and highest and most profitable thing that you as a Christian can do—looking to the needs of the time, and the claims of Christ, and the progress of the race—that you should be living a life of luxury, while about you is ringing the ceaseless and fearful cry of a world of poverty and suffering which all the glitter and gaiety of your feasts cannot avail to shut out?" That is the question; and it is a question which has but one answer.

St. Paul, as we see, is setting before us the need of aiming at the higher standards in life. His was the spirit in which Christ Himself had warned men that, when they had done all their duty, they were still "unprofitable servants"; in which He tried to spur them to larger efforts and loftier conceptions by such words as these—"If ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?" The commonplace morality of the world, even at its best, is not high enough for the Christian life. It is of the essence of Christianity that it aims always at the highest possible attainment. Weak and erring and beset by temptation, we are not likely to realise our ideal; we shall certainly fail to do so; but the great thing is—and this is the true note of the Christian life—that it *has* an ideal, and that it strives to keep it pure. As members of the Church of Christ, as Knights of the Red

Cross, we are enrolled in a great society; and the old motto belongs as truly to our spiritual aristocracy as to any other in the world—*Noblesse oblige!*

“All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient.” I commend to you, therefore, this maxim of St. Paul as a practical rule of life. You will find in it a real touchstone of Christian endeavour and of Christian progress, and a guide worth following in some of the moral perplexities of our time. There are many about us, Christian in name and profession, who seem to be contented with themselves if they can satisfy the elementary requirements of the Christian law, if they have reached the current standards of social respectability, if they pass through life without palpable and open shame, and in a fairly successful compromise, as they think, between God and the world. By God’s grace, it shall not be so with us. We will at least

aim at great things, if our achievement be small; and for our warning, no less than for our consolation, we will remember that it was neither respectability of life, nor prudent avoidance of evil, nor even the conscientious performance of strict duty, which won Christ's highest benediction; but—"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

XI

TESTS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE AND WORK

“Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ . . . and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.”—I COR. iii. 11-13.

IT is in such phrases as these that we see revealed both the reality of St. Paul’s religious belief and the depth of his character. He was writing to a body of men who had evidently very confused and imperfect ideas as to both the morality and the dogmas of the Christian faith. The Church of Corinth was far from being a perfect Church—was more than inclined to be lax in morals and schismatic in doctrine. And St. Paul had doubtless both these fail-

ings in view when he wrote the passage before us. With the penetrating insight of a prophetic nature, he had seen, and now proceeds, by an emphatic metaphor, to enforce the truth, that of religious work and life there can be but two tests: first, Is it built on the foundation of Christ Himself? and next, Does it issue in that morality which constitutes the eternal order of the world? To be built on Christ, and to be able to face the moral tests of life, these appear to St. Paul the two essential things in Christianity. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ . . . and the fire"—(that fire of reality which must ultimately shrivel up all men's petty deceptions and self-deceits; the fire of pain, the fire of death, the fire of the judgment of the Presence of God)—"shall try every man's work of what sort it is."

The present is, perhaps, a time in which we ought to feel most keenly the force of words like these. The real danger of a prolonged controversy such as that which is now going on with regard to the details of Christian worship lies in this—that it tends to confound the outward form with the inner reality of religion. Those who take part in it begin, in not a few cases, to believe that right opinions on the controverted points are essential to Christianity, and that there is something necessarily religious in taking an interest in them or in holding an opinion about them. In all ages it has been found comparatively easy to form and maintain definite views as to the ceremonial of religion, infinitely difficult to exhibit the fruits of religion in being just, unselfish, and true. And this, I repeat, is the danger to which we seem to be increasingly exposed—the danger of not distinguishing between the

essentials and the non-essentials of religion; the danger of attaching an undue importance to questions which, while undoubtedly serious in their bearing on the spiritual life, yet do not lie among the weightier matters of the law; the danger of forgetting that we may be ardently attached to this or that party in the Christian Church—may be thoroughly catholic or purely evangelical in our theories of the Church, its ministry, its worship, and its sacraments—and yet have less of the spirit and the mind of Christ than one whom we condemn for narrowness or ignorance or unbelief. Over the gates of the school of theological disputation these words might well be written: “To obey is better than sacrifice.”

1. If we apply to the present discussion the principles of St. Paul, we shall see, quite irrespective of our own inclinations or opinions, how immense is their significance.

Suppose the question at issue is one touching the outward form of the Church—the limits of ritual, the character of a sacrament. St. Paul would apply two tests: Is this ritual built upon the foundation of Christ? and, Can it stand the fire of reality?

It is singular how often the first of these tests seems to be overlooked in ecclesiastical controversy. In arguments either for or against a given piece of ritualism, we seldom hear it asked whether it is in keeping with the spirit and the teaching of Christ; whether it involves practices and ideas which He would encourage or rebuke; whether it is a form which we can suppose Him likely to countenance if He were among us to-day. Nothing, let us remember, can be in any sense necessary or proper in the Christian Church for which we can find no sanction, direct or indirect, in the words of

Christ Himself. This is a plain and simple test; and the fact that there must be progress in a Church—that a Church may and must grow, with the process of time, in a clearer understanding of her Master's will—does not make the test much more difficult than it would otherwise be. For if we apply it in sincerity, we at least find it comparatively easy to judge whether this or that practice, this or that ceremony, is actually inconsistent with anything that Christ has said or done; and if we go about our quest in this spirit, and with a reverent determination to follow His example, we shall not be led much astray from the truth. Let this, then, be our first resolve: that Christ shall be the sole foundation on which we build.

And then there is St. Paul's second test: that every man's work shall be tried "by fire." Apply this also to ritual; and we

shall see that the true test of ritual is that it shall have a reality, a *moral* meaning—that it shall not be something sentimental, fantastic, artistic, but play a real part in the spiritual life of those who accept it. It must be obvious, on any theory, that the ultimate end of all the externals of religion, of all the ceremonial of worship, can only be the edification, the spiritual training, of the worshippers; if it does not secure that end, it is a piece of vanity, to be consumed and not purified by the fire of God; and yet it is just this *moral* significance of worship that we rarely see sufficiently emphasised, either by those who accept or by those who reject the more elaborate ceremonial.

2. But it has been said, and with a certain degree of justice, that divergencies of ceremonial imply and spring out of divergencies of doctrine. To doctrine, therefore, we must apply the tests of St. Paul; and

this, no doubt, is the special application that he is making of them in the present chapter.

Christ the foundation—that is the foremost test of doctrine. If we examine the various dogmas which have grown up during the history of the Church, it is easy enough to perceive that some of them have no connection whatever with the primitive teaching of the Gospel. Who can suppose, for example, that the dogma of transubstantiation is in any sense a legitimate development of the original institution of the Lord's Supper? Breathe the pure air of that upper chamber on the eve of the Crucifixion, and you will not easily find yourself at home in a different atmosphere. And what is true of one part of the creed is true of all. Grant that there may be a development of doctrine; that the Church may have been guided into truth misunderstood, or half understood, in those early days; yet it

still remains the fact that developments may take a wrong direction; that the Church is not infallible; that there may be (and assuredly have been) departures from the lines on which Christianity ought to have moved forward through the world. What remains, therefore, is, that the later developments must be candidly and persistently examined in the light of the original teaching. We must return perpetually to the person of Christ. We must drink of His spirit before we attempt to look out upon the world of truth. He is the foundation on which the dogmatic system of the Church must be built up; and any part of it, however venerable for antiquity or interest or beauty, stands condemned which has no basis in His life and words.

And finally, as in the case of ritual, so in the case of doctrine, there is the test of reality: the question to be asked and answered,

whether a given dogma has a *moral* value ; the question whether a creed, or any article of a creed, has been accepted merely from habit or tradition or convenience, or as a recognised part of a great system, or whether it really has a practical place in the progress of the soul.

It is difficult to turn away from studying the ecclesiastical phenomena of the times without a strong and a deepening conviction that what the Church needs at the present day is not so much a solution of the problems discussed, as a larger share, a richer inheritance, of the spirit and temper of her Lord. If we were more like Christ, there would be less talk about Christianity. If we were more like Christ, we might remember better, amid the war of words and battle of arguments, that great saying of His which can never pass away, "God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

XII

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

“We are members one of another.”—EPH. iv. 25.

IT is clear from the writings of St. Paul that one of his leading ideas was that of the unity of the Church. When he looked at the Christian society, he saw in it not a mass of separate atoms moving this way or that, according to their own will and pleasure, but one compact body, cohesive and interdependent in all its parts. His very first warning to the great Church of Corinth was that its members had forgotten this idea of corporate existence, and had broken up what was essentially one body into many sections—the parties of Paul and Apollos,

of Cephas and Christ; and this breach of the Church's unity roused the Apostle to an emphatic and indignant rebuke. Elsewhere, in a similar spirit, he draws an elaborate parallel between the Church and the human body, showing that, as the human body is one organism including in itself various members, of which every one is in close relation with every other, and has both its own rights from the rest, and its own duties to the rest, so is it also with the Church. The Church is a body; its head is Christ; and we all—as he reminds the men of Ephesus in the words before us—we all “are members one of another.”

This idea of unity is very much in our minds just now. In the celebration of last week¹ we saw the visible expression of the unity of a great nation and of a great empire; and this political expression is to be

¹ June 1897.

followed immediately by an ecclesiastical one. In the next few days there will meet at Lambeth the greatest religious Conference which has ever been held in this country; when two hundred Bishops from all quarters of the earth—from the Anglican Church at home and in the colonies, and from all the Churches in communion with it—will deliberate on subjects of far-reaching significance. And while we trust that their debates may be rich in practical suggestions and results, we cannot but feel that the most casual observer must be impressed by the mere fact that such a Conference is and can be held. It reminds us of the enormous expansion of the Church of England during the present reign. It recalls to us our missionary duties and our spiritual responsibilities abroad as well as at home. It fires the imagination with the vision of the possibilities of Anglo-Saxon Christianity if only it

be true to itself and to its essential naturalness and simplicity of life and thought. And, as we watch these great representatives of Christian work and effort assembling "from the uttermost parts of the earth," with common aims and aspirations, to take and to give counsel on the shores of the Thames, we cannot but see in their meeting another and a very striking illustration of the maxim of St. Paul, "we are members one of another."

I. What, then, do we mean by the unity of the Church, thus forcibly brought before us? There are those to whom unity means nothing short of uniformity, and who would have everybody think and act in exactly the same way—that way being, of course, the way in which they think and act themselves. In ordinary life, as we are well aware, there is a somewhat singular impulse in human nature which urges us to attempt to impress

our own opinions on everybody else ; and if we see a friend behaving, or being treated, in a manner which does not fall in with our own private views of what is fit and proper, we are apt, in degrees that vary from the natural to the absurd, to resent it. But this impulse is just as strong in the affairs of religion ; and so it comes about that many people cannot understand any unity but that of a more or less complete uniformity in creed and conduct. They want everybody to hold their beliefs, and practise their ritual, and teach on their system, and repeat their shibboleths, or they are not satisfied.

The English temperament, however, it is perfectly clear, will never admit of a unity of this sort. "The English people," we have been lately told by a bishop and historian, "will never be dragooned into any uniformity whatsoever"; and therefore the unity of the Church, as far as we are con-

cerned, must be a unity which allows, first of all, of a certain liberty of thought and conduct. A strict uniformity is not possible among us: it may be doubted whether it is even desirable. Men are appealed to in many different ways and through many different channels; local variations often meet local needs; experiments and varying methods of work have their value in religion as in science; and all these things should remind us that a living, if somewhat indefinite, unity may be better than a rigid and hardly living uniformity. This, at any rate, whether we like it or not, is the position of the Church of England. It says: "There are some things essential in Christianity and some things accidental. If you can accept the things essential—and they are very few—and approve, on the whole, of my forms of worship, I can accept *you*. And in things accidental you may think and do as you

will, according as God and your conscience may direct." The hand and the foot, in St. Paul's metaphor, have their separate characters and functions; yet each is a true and a necessary member of one body.

2. And therefore, in the next place, true unity, if it admits of a certain liberty of thought and conduct, must also admit of a generous appreciation of good in those from whom we differ. Here again St. Paul's comparison of the body and the Church does not fail to point the right lesson. "The eye," he tells the partisans at Corinth, "cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." The eye must recognise that, though the character and function of the hand are widely different from its own, it also has its definite use and service in the body.

We find it difficult to learn this lesson,

even within the limits of our own Church. Few things are more common, few more pathetic, and, in face of the world's sin and sorrow, few more appalling, than to see good men standing aloof from other good men—members of the same Church and working with equal earnestness towards the same end; criticising and disparaging them, and emphasising all their failures and weaknesses, just because they do not belong to the same school of thought as themselves. Those of you who have studied the life of Frederick Robertson—one of the noblest men, and, in some ways, perhaps the greatest preacher that the Church of England has ever produced—will remember his spiritual isolation, and the bitter violence of the attacks directed by a soulless and mindless orthodoxy against a man who was unhappily too sensitive to receive his critics with the profound indifference which they deserved. The tragedy of

that life is a warning to us all. It bids us exchange the spirit of criticism and condemnation for a more Christ-like generosity of feeling. It warns us against the narrowness of outlook, the lack of charity, and the sense of self-importance, which are so often the curse of the religious partisan. It urges us to seek with patience, and to note with thankfulness, even in men and movements from which we differ most, that "soul of good" which makes them what they are.

3. But there is yet another and a final mark of the unity of the Church. If we can cultivate a sympathetic rather than a critical spirit, can we not also combine with others in practical measures for the common good? The idea of reunion is in the air, but it is very vague; and I do not gather at present, even from its most enthusiastic champions, either how it is to be effected or what are to be its results. It cannot be denied that

between Church and Church, and even between the various parties within the Church, there are serious grounds of intellectual difference; and these cannot be lightly overstepped. What is left to us, then, is more sympathetic co-operation on those practical questions on which there is very little room for disagreement. Looked at largely, the battle of Christianity is the battle between good and evil in the world; all Christians, of all schools of thought, are fighting for the good; and the forces of evil are so gigantic and so persistent, that it is mere madness to divide and disorganise the energies that might, in combination, be twice or thrice as effective as they now are. If ever, as an able writer has threatened us, the hordes of barbarism should rise up and sweep over civilised countries, you would hardly expect to find the soldiers who might hold the last fort of civilisation against the barbaric invader en-

gaged in disputes among themselves. Yet the Christian army, in its several detachments, holds the fort of good against the forces of evil; and on the great practical questions of gambling and drunkenness, of immorality and sensuality and crime, it does seem as if we ought to be able to make a more united stand than we do.

The thoughts of the times point us towards this ideal. Last Sunday we had a special prayer for unity: let us see that we work for it as well. In the way in which we think and speak of men, by the willingness with which we recognise their liberty to differ from us, the goodness of their aims and of their works, and the need of joining with them in every noble cause, let us show, each one of us, some practical realisation of the bond by which we are "members one of another"; so that, "as there is one body, and one spirit, and one hope of our calling, one

Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may henceforth be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify God: through Jesus Christ our Lord."

XIII

GAINS AND LOSSES

“What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.”—PHIL. iii. 7.

IT is a remarkable fact that the more closely men look into life and the world, the further they are carried away from ordinary estimates of the value and meaning of what they see. The proverb that appearances are deceitful is found, unlike most proverbs, to be literally and strictly true. Thus it is commonly supposed, and indeed on the surface of things is plainly undeniable, that wealth is always a good, unpopularity an evil, pain a disaster. Look below the surface, analyse the real facts, and you find that money, without adding to the power of enjoyment, carries

with it sometimes great anxieties, always enormous responsibilities, and seldom makes its possessors happy; that unpopularity is the shield with which Truth protects her noblest disciples from the contamination of the world; that pain is not only Nature's danger-signal and part of her attempt to cure the disease, but one of her highest agents in elevating and purifying character. Gains are found to be losses, and losses to be gains.

Such was the experience of St. Paul when his conversion to Christianity cut his life in two. He began to realise, as men always will under the stress of a strong religious impulse, that hitherto he had been walking in darkness, and that now the true light was shining. Things he had thought good were found to be evil, things he had thought evil were found to be good. It was like the sun rising to unveil an undiscovered country.

Beneath that strange light everything began to take on new colours and new proportions. "On account of Christ," as he expresses it, gains had become losses; not absolutely, that is, in themselves, but relatively to what he now knew and saw, his estimate of things was changed. It was not so much that the world itself had altered; it was that in St. Paul a change had taken place. What a man is, that he sees; and if St. Paul saw differently, if the world was to him a new world henceforward, it was because, under that wonderful, transforming, vivifying touch, he had himself become a new man.

It may be of value to us in our own personal lives to notice some of the points in which St. Paul found himself compelled, as a Christian, to modify or to reverse his judgment. What were the things which in his old life had been gains, but now were losses?

1. Foremost among them, we may be

sure, he would set the opinions and prizes and comforts of the world—the materialistic side of life; all those things drawn together by St. John under the significant phrase, “The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” St. Paul had been a young man of good birth and education, apparently in comfortable circumstances, leading a highly moral and respectable life. Comfort, money, social position, social esteem, respectability—St. Paul had possessed them all, had prized them all, as his neighbours did; now, he had thrown them all away. They had become nothing to him—absolutely nothing. “I do count them refuse,” he cries, “that I may win Christ.” In themselves they were trivial and useless; but so far as they had hindered him from coming to the knowledge of Christ, they had been worse than useless—they had been positive “loss.” Henceforth the comfortable, respectable, well-

to-do, socially popular Saul disappears; and in his place we have a new Paul—a man living hardly by the work of his own hands, scouring the earth in pain and hunger and weariness, facing many forms of death by sea and land, the spectacle and the laughing-stock of the world. If from the sight of so practical a surrender and willing a sacrifice of the so-called good things of life, we can turn away without a deepened desire for a just estimate of what is worth having and doing, and what is not worth having and doing in the world, must we not question whether that knowledge of Christ, which to St. Paul had become supreme, really holds an unchallenged supremacy in our own affections and hearts?

2. Next among the things to which St. Paul attached a new value were intellectual gifts. Brought up in the strictest sect of the Pharisees, and accustomed to all the dia-

lectic of the Rabbinical schools, he would naturally, as a young man, have thought very highly of intellectual capacity. Clever, astute, brilliantly argumentative himself, a master of rhetoric and of logic, the very simplicity of the teaching of Christ must have seemed childish to him in his early days. Without learning, he must have been almost tempted to think, no religion.

But observe how violent is his reaction from all this. The Cross of Christ is "foolishness"; yes, he knows it; it is foolishness; yet he prefers it to all the "wisdom" of the world. Christianity is one of the "weak" things; yet it is able to confound the "strong." Cleverness, intellectual superiority, theological attainments—all these have suddenly ceased to have any real significance; so far as they have kept him back from Christ, these too have been losses, not gains, in his life.

For a new world had opened upon St. Paul—a world in which the religion of a wise man might be the religion of a slave or of a child. How tremendous a revolution in the mind of a Pharisee! It was not that St. Paul, like some Christians in later days, despised knowledge in itself, or thought lightly of a cultivated intellect. It was merely that he would not allow these things to become supreme in that spiritual sphere in which clearness of moral vision and a child-like simplicity are chiefly needed for the attainment of truth. A man, as St. Paul was aware, may know much, and yet be a fool in the higher things of life; he may have advanced far on the path of philosophy or science, and yet have drawn not an inch nearer to God; he may be too clever, as he may be not clever enough, and require to be purged of his narrow and dogmatic intellectualism. If a man knows much, or has in-

tellectual gifts, and yet is self-conceited, or bigoted, or selfish, or in any way proud of having taken his tiny little step out into the immeasurable darkness by which the human mind is surrounded, what does his knowledge profit him? If he thinks that he is wise, says St. Paul with fearful irony, let him become "a fool"—a fool, yes! if by so doing, he can find the golden key to that kingdom of which a greater than St. Paul has said, that whosoever will not become as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

3. And lastly, beyond the material and the intellectual, there remains the spiritual side of life; and it was here above all that St. Paul found reason to change his point of view. How proud St. Paul had been of the spiritual privileges which he had enjoyed; of belonging, as he did, to the *élite* of the religious society of his day! "Circumcised the eighth day, a Hebrew

of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless"—so he describes in this passage his loyalty to the purest Jewish life and practice, his devotion to the strictest Jewish religionism. But, as he now recognised, his very satisfaction with his religious surroundings had proved his snare; his very attention as a Pharisee to the forms and ritual of religion had drawn him away from a really spiritual faith.

And it is here that St. Paul's experience touches and illuminates our own. It may be that some of us are satisfied with our religious surroundings, and as we attend our favourite church, or discuss the petty philanthropies with which we keep our conscience quiet, may never realise either what the call of Christ involves, or how slender is our own response. Or it may be that,

leaning too heavily on those rites and ceremonies in religion which at their best are only the crutches of the spiritual life, we are losing the wish and the power to walk in that path of the imitation of Christ, which alone leads men upwards to the City of God, and are becoming practical materialists in Divine things. In such cases are we not in danger of losing that one thing needful, which will certainly be taken away unless we cherish it?

“What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.” *For Christ*—that was the spark that fired the mine, and scattered all St. Paul’s theories and opinions and self-satisfactions to the winds! Those two words meant the introduction of a new spirit into his life—the spirit of sacrifice, the spirit of the Cross. Body, mind, and soul, each appealed to him in a new and unprecedented way; and for each, therefore,

he had made some self-surrender. He had made a sacrifice of physical comforts and enjoyments; he had made a sacrifice of intellectual pleasures and recreations; he had made a sacrifice, hardest of all, of spiritual convictions and spiritual privileges. And in so doing St. Paul was acting in accordance with the true genius of Christianity. Christianity is not primarily a dogmatic system, intellectually apprehended; nor primarily a form of worship, with sacraments and priesthood. It is, first and foremost of all, *a life*—a life of simplicity and reality, and charity and self-denial. "Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me,"—this is, in brief, the sum of the Gospel; and if we as a Church, if we in our own individual lives, are to represent in any fulness the idea of Christ, it can only be by a real endeavour to fashion our mind, and temper, and will,

and conscience, after the example of Him, to win whom St. Paul was more than contented to suffer the loss of all things, and without whose practical guidance and inspiration, Christian worship and Christian orthodoxy are nothing but empty dreams.

XIV

THE LAW OF CHRIST

“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”—GAL. vi. 2.

WHAT is religion ? is a question which has been often asked and often answered, but never with any great success. Religion is indeed one of those ultimate facts of the world which are better felt than defined. If we say that religion is the sum of the relations existing between the soul and a superior being or beings, known by the name of God, we give a definition which may perhaps be accurate, but is still too vague to be satisfactory. Again, we may describe rather than define it by pointing, with St. James, to the special virtues which

it promotes: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Or yet again, we may describe it in a practical way by explaining its purpose and its end.

What, then, is the purpose of religion? In all ages men have given two great answers to that question. The vast majority have supposed that by religion we save ourselves from the consequences of sin; we appease the wrath of an angry God, and escape some definite and local punishment to which the wicked are hereafter doomed. Such men regard the Church as a kind of shield interposed between themselves and eternal retribution. Without any special love of goodness, or any passionate devotion to the right, they accept the forms of religion as somehow rescuing them from the con-

sequences of those sins of which they cannot be altogether unconscious.

That is one and a totally false answer to the question. The true answer is, that the purpose of religion is to save us, not from the consequences of sin, but from sin itself. It is sin, not punishment, which we have to fear. It is the love, not the anger of God, which must determine our actions. If religion, and the Church in which it is realised, do not save us from wrong-doing—do not make us wiser, purer, and nobler than we should be without them—then is religion the most useless dream, the idlest figment ever invented by the brain of man. But if religion does save us, not merely from the penalties and terrors of a future world, but in this world, here and now, from the infinite and ever-present terror and degradation of sin, then we begin to understand, if we cannot adequately define, true

religion. God is love: that is its basis. The present salvation of the soul: that is its end.

But the moment we have taken that step another becomes necessary. God is love: but if so, by St. John's inference, we also ought "to love the brethren." The salvation of the soul: but then this involves help given and service done to others. And thus we come to another essential characteristic of religion as suggested by our text. The law of Christ, says St. Paul, is the law of love—of altruism, of charity, of sympathy, or what else we like to call it. Something more is asked than a selfish absorption in the means supposed to be necessary for the salvation of one's own soul. How far St. Paul saved his soul by saving the souls of others, we know well enough. Never was there a life more persistently devoted than his to the service of humanity; more

rich in effort for the needy, in sympathy for the weak. God is love: that is the basis of religion; and the proof of it is found in the love which, in obedience to this law of Christ, the disciple is capable of showing to his fellow-men.

When, however, we regard the world about us in the light of scientific research or even of common experience, we wonder at first whether that basis of religion, "God is love," is a sound basis after all. The aspect of things is terribly stern—so stern that men have sometimes tried to find refuge from it in a philosophy which represents God as struggling with an evil which He cannot altogether subdue. In the pain, the labour, the fierce competition, that reign through nature and in human life, we see the traces of a power that often looks almost malignant, or even blind to the tears and deaf to the agonies of men. We see Nature, in

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herself as in the poet's verse, "red in tooth and claw"; we hear her "shriek against" the creed that God is love. If God is love, men have asked, why is not more love manifested in creation? Why is progress towards the good and right absolutely dependent upon competition—the deadly struggle of individual against individual, of species against species, of race against race, in every department of Nature and in every age of her eternal being? Was it a God of love who could create a world whose very constitution provides that the weakest shall be trampled down and only the strong survive? Is it a God of love who can sanction, after the millenniums of the past, such a society as we see to-day—a society bitter with class feeling, with political animosities, with inhuman hatred breaking into acts of violence, and international jealousies verging upon war?

At first sight there is much to the purpose in these questionings. There is, indeed, always this much truth in them, that, with all our knowledge, we are not able to explain the world. Take three steps in any direction, and you find yourself face to face with an impenetrable mystery. Such a mystery is pain. Religion does not explain it; it is not its function to do so; it offers consolation to the suffering and strength to the weak, but it never tells them why they are not among the happy and the strong. We gain nothing, therefore—we lose infinitely much—by pretending to an omniscience which we do not and cannot possess about the dark ordinances of things, or by wrapping up in a cloud of words difficulties which are not the less vital because they are, for the moment, concealed. It were better to confess frankly, with St. Paul, that now we know only “in part.”

Nevertheless, another side of the truth is now coming into prominence. Science, which has told us so much of the struggle and competition in Nature, is beginning to tell us of a new factor in progress. It is that very thing which constitutes the law of Christ — co-operation or sympathy. Sympathy, we are now learning, is a factor in progress too. A recent work which has been widely read brings before us very clearly the way in which co-operation is felt in the natural world. With less originality of thought than some have supposed, but still with a great charm of style and felicity of language, the writer points out that progress has come not only through the struggle for life, but through the struggle for the life *of others*; not from selfishness only, but from love. We see how true advance begins with the family and its ties of mutual help and affection. We see how those species

(and man especially) tend to survive among which sympathy has been known. We see, in fact, how love—the love, first, of the mother, then of the father, and last of brother for brother—has been the goal and crown and summit of the evolution of the world. All is not struggle and selfishness in Nature. The chant of religion, “God is love,” is being taken up by the lips of science. Science herself is beginning to charge us, with a new and deeper meaning than before, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

And the sympathy thus manifested in Nature is rapidly striking its roots more widely and more deeply in the common heart of man. Within the last few days several events have occurred to show the responsive power of that common heart. We in this church have suffered a great, indeed an irreparable, loss in losing the presence and service of a

revered teacher, whose labour of twenty-five years in this place reaches its end to-day.¹ We, as citizens of this country, in the very hour of public rejoicing for another cause, have had to meet a catastrophe severe and sorrowful enough to assume the proportions of a national disaster. We, as citizens of the world, have had to witness in France one of those tragedies which arrest but rarely the eyes of all nations. And the feeling which these events have called forth proves that our sympathy — our national, yes, and our international sympathy — is really quick in expression and delicate in form. It shows us that we could, if we would, easily maintain cordial and friendly relations with other countries, in place of the bitterness and jealousy still, alas! too common. It points us to a time, not per-

¹ July 1, 1894, the day on which Dr. Vaughan resigned the office of Master of the Temple.

haps very distant, when a fair and just arbitration will supersede our present crude and childish method of appealing to animal force in the settlement of disputes. Everybody who has studied the development of the race knows that there have been periods in which war was the mother of virtues, incidental, and even necessary, to progress. Everybody who has so studied knows that those days are long since past. War has become an anachronism and a crime. It is, to-day as much a relic of barbarism as the belief in idols or in witchcraft. As those who believe in the brotherhood of men, and in the bond of that sympathy which is the very law of Christ, we are pledged to do what we can to hasten the coming of the time, already shining on the far horizon, when war shall be a memory and a dream; when the fellow-feeling, which we now see break out only on special and stirring occa-

sions, shall have become not merely a fitful enthusiasm, but an habitual and constant mood, "the fountain-light of all our day."

Such an end may seem the vision of a prophet, impossible of fulfilment; but it is not so. All Nature works that way, and that end shall be accomplished. To hasten it, if not in that great sphere, at least in the sphere of our personal life, is the task open to us all. If sympathy is the law of Christ, we can easily test, in some measure, our obedience to that law by faithfully asking ourselves a few questions. What social service have we done for our generation? What have we done to remove ignorance, to add to knowledge, to alleviate distress? Or, if these questions are too large, Where are the persons—nay, where even is the individual soul—that is the better for our life? It is in the will to be charitable and not critical, sympathetic and not proud, helpful

and not selfish—in the readiness to give rather than to take—that the humblest life, without leaving the beaten track on which it moves, can find the golden opportunity of being Christian. Even in those things we may see, with our modern novelist, “the vision of a poor weak soul striving after good. It was not cut short; and in the end it learnt, through tears and much pain, that holiness is an infinite compassion for others; that greatness is to take the common things of life and walk truly among them; that happiness is a great love and much serving.”

He that has learnt that lesson has indeed learnt something of the spirit and the mind of Christ.

XV

THE FEWNESS OF CHRIST'S DISCIPLES

“Who hath believed our report?”—ROM. x. 16.

THE prophet here quoted by St. Paul is complaining of the incredulity of his people. He has foretold the coming of a Deliverer to Israel, who should appear in strange and unexpected shape. Instead of the glorious and triumphant monarch whom the national sentiment and imagination had identified with the expected Messiah, they see, in the picture which the prophet paints before them, one who has no form nor comeliness nor beauty; “his visage marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.” Instead of a great prince welcomed

by the enthusiasm of a ransomed nation, they see one "despised and rejected," "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Instead of a king ruling as God's own appointed minister and representative, they see one so fearfully "smitten of God and afflicted," that "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Such is the picture which the prophet is called upon to paint, and which he paints with absolute faithfulness; not a tone is softened, not a colour qualified; and there it stands, in all its rigid outlines, a thing of astonishment to the world—a thing utterly and completely different from everything that had been hoped for and expected. And who that has reflected on the strength and tenacity of popular prejudice can wonder when he finds such a reception given to the prophet's words that, in the very midst of his description, he is obliged to break off into

the half-indignant and half-pathetic cry,
"Who hath believed our report?"

The pathos of the question did not go unnoticed in a later day. It is quoted not only in the Fourth Gospel, but also in that tenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans from which our text is taken. In that remarkable passage the great Apostle to the Gentiles is setting forth the universality of the redemption which he has been commissioned to preach. "There is no difference," he says, in words which must have sounded very strangely in the ears of many of his countrymen—"There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek. . . . For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." There is, he adds, a special reason why he should carry his Gospel into other lands. The Jewish people, as a nation, have rejected their Messiah. God has stretched forth His hands to them, and they

have refused to hear. The message has been spoken, and they have neither listened nor obeyed. And then, with a touch of the same passionate sorrow shown by the prophet of old, and with the knowledge of even a sadder rejection and a more terrible unbelief, St. Paul recalls and appropriates to himself the very words in which the national apostasy had been lamented—"Who hath believed our report?"

"Who hath believed our report?" The fewness of Christ's disciples has been, no doubt, in all ages, as in the time of the Apostle, a cause for wonder. If God did indeed intend His revelation to give light to something more than a fragment of our race, if the Cross is indeed the symbol of a world-wide redemption, if Christ being lifted up does indeed draw all men unto Him, why have so few taken a place, at any rate consciously and deliberately, in the

society which He founded? Why have so few "believed the report" of an Isaiah or a Paul?

The question goes far, and cannot perhaps be fully answered. But when we come to consider it, and especially when we look into the beginnings of Christianity, and try to read there its true character and motive and purpose, we are aware of two great facts apart from which such a question cannot be approached at all. Nor need we be surprised to find that these two facts are elsewhere familiar to us in our daily, as well as in our scientific, experience. As God is at work in Christianity, so He is at work in the natural world. As Nature is never less than a revelation, so Christianity is never unnatural. And therefore, as a general rule, we may expect to see God working in both of them on the same principles and by the same methods.

1. We find then, first, this law in Nature, that the higher the organism, the slower the growth. It is several years before a child can live and act without the help of his parents, and thirty or forty years before he reaches maturity; but the bird flies from the nest in a few weeks from birth, and within an hour or two of breaking from the chrysalis the butterfly has spread its wings. Similarly, in man himself, the physical frame arrives at perfection before the mental powers, and the mental powers before the gifts of character and will. Everywhere in Nature, as you ascend the scale, you find complexity and slowness of development going together; and the higher the creature, the more obscure and mysterious and insignificant its origin, when viewed in the light of what it is destined to become.

Now this very thing is true of Christianity itself. It had so small a beginning just

because it was destined to become so great. The Jews of an earlier day were deaf to the prophet's pleading. Why? Because he spoke to them of a despised and rejected Christ, living in sorrow and humility, and bearing the sins of many. But if only they had looked a little closer at that visage marred and that form without comeliness, might they not have seen there the traces of the very King in His beauty? If they had watched more patiently that chastisement with which, as a transgressor, He was to be "smitten of God and afflicted," might they not have better understood the love of the Father towards a Son in whom He is "well-pleased"? The Jews of a later day turned away with contempt from the teaching of St. Paul. Why? Because he spoke to them of a Galilean peasant and a crucified Christ. "Is not this the carpenter's son?" "Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." Such

was their reply. But had they chosen to think that all great and high things have small beginnings, surely the mystery and insignificance of that birth and life and death would never have baffled them so !

And yet, even to-day, do we not often see symptoms of the same temper still surviving in our midst ? Men will still ask for signs and wonders in Christianity ; they look for something miraculous, startling, intellectually brilliant or overwhelmingly convincing ; and as this is wanting they remain dissatisfied. Or, it may be, within the circle of their own life and conduct, they fancy that they cannot be real followers of Christ, unless there is something heroic or eccentric or unusual about them. They do not seem to understand that the quiet heroism of daily life is the truest token of the Christian spirit. They do not realise that the God for whom they have listened in vain in the fire, the

earthquake, and the wind, may be heard most clearly in the still, small voice.

2. Again, we have read much of late with regard to that natural law, the law of the survival of the fittest. It is still, no doubt, very imperfectly understood ; but it seems to have a counterpart in the spiritual world, in what we may almost call the law of the survival of the spiritually fittest. Christianity may be intended for all mankind ; but in practice we see that a principle of selection is, and must be, at work. The call may come to every man ; but every man may not choose to receive it. God will make no man a Christian against his will ; and where there is hardness of heart, or an over-fondness of pleasure, or a character weakened by careless living or wilful sloth or cowardice or absorption in the cares of this world, may it not easily happen that the Word is crushed, or withered, or made unfruitful ?

So we see everywhere in the Gospels this unavoidable selection of men. Christ is perpetually choosing—choosing for His disciples those who are willing to hear and to obey the call. In the very first portrait given of Him, He is represented with a winnowing fan, separating the wheat from the chaff. He does not indeed seem to have ever expected that He would be welcomed by the world at large, or that at His coming He would find His faith triumphant upon the earth. Rather He regarded His Church as a small society intended to act upon the world about it with a definite influence ; comparing it now with the leaven which modifies the surrounding substance, now with the lamp which shines far out into the surrounding darkness. And if this is what He wished Christianity to be and to do, who can deny that He has been and is being successful ? The Church has so far transformed the

world that, even now, after these few brief centuries have passed, the whole fabric of modern civilisation is, partly in practice and still more in theory, built upon Christian principles; and there is no man living who would be what he is to-day if Christ had never trod this earth. In this sense we may say that, by a secret power and a subtle and pervasive influence, men have been compelled to own His sovereignty, to respond to His call, and to believe the "report" of those who have preached in His name.

"Who hath believed our report?" In the beautiful story of the Epiphany, in which the Wise Men are described as coming from the far East to Bethlehem to seek their spiritual King, both these great truths appear. They find, when their search is over, nothing but a child lying in a manger; yet it is to Him, as to a supreme monarch, that they offer their priceless gifts of gold and frankincense

and myrrh. They have followed a light which has shined into all the world ; yet they have followed it because it was a light which has shined into the darkness of their own hearts. May it be so with each one of ourselves ; and by the reverence with which we recognise His greatness and beauty even in His low estate, and by the courage and faithfulness with which we make His call our own, may it be known that we too have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him !



XVI

ENEMIES OF THE CROSS

“They are the enemies of the Cross of Christ.”—PHIL. iii. 18.

OF all the heresies that darkened the purity and disturbed the peace of the primitive Church, none was more subtle or more remarkable than that which St. Paul is deliberately assailing in the chapter before us. The Church of Philippi was not a weak or disloyal Church. On the contrary, although, in spite of the brilliant promise of its early days, it was destined “to live without a history” and “to die without a memorial,” it was at present one of the strongest outposts of an advancing Christianity, “foremost among all the apostolic communities in faith and

love." Still, no Church has ever been perfectly pure ; none, even in the ardent dreams of its young enthusiasm, free from all stain. And therefore we are not surprised to find even at Philippi manifest signs of weakness. Teachers were, it seems, going about in the Church with a false and most disastrous theory on the subject of faith and works. They were not sceptics or unbelievers, but professing Christians ; yet they had actually persuaded themselves, and were trying to persuade others, that if once a man were accepted by God through faith in Christ, his life and conduct became matters of indifference. Justification before God lifted them, they held, above the claims of the moral law ; and as soon as they were safe in that respect, the struggle after goodness became quite useless. "Only believe!" they would cry ; "be saved once for all, and it does not matter how you live."

It seems incredible to us that teaching so certain to bring forth bitter fruit in the lives of men should have crept and intruded into the fold of Christ. Yet that the danger was a real and a pressing one we may judge very plainly from the attitude of St. Paul. His words, which seem a little vague until we have found the right key to them, are those of a definite and uncompromising attack on this special heresy. It was evidently not uncommon; for "many walk," he tells us, on that path, and he has "often" been compelled to sound a warning. It was evidently not unattended by fatal results; for the Apostle is unable to speak of it without "weeping." The tears of St. Paul, like those of Jesus, are rarely recorded; never except upon occasions solemn enough to stir the fountain of his religious feeling to its very depths, and thus to make his tears a witness to the true meaning and splendour of the Gospel.

“What is the gospel of St. Paul?” asks a well-known preacher of France. “Is it but a refined deism, announcing as its whole doctrine the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, as its whole revelation the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, as its only mediator Jesus Christ, living as prophet and dying as martyr? Or is this gospel unlike all others . . . proclaiming a God unknown, promising an indescribable deliverance, demanding a radical change, compassionate and terrible at once . . . high as heaven, deep as hell? You need not, for your answer, consult the writings of the Apostle: you have but to see him weeping at your feet.”

Then, too, the mischief of the heresy is shown by the earnestness with which, in the passage preceding our text, St. Paul, with these same teachers in his mind, seeks to point out the true way. “I at any rate

have not attained!" he exclaims. "I do not count myself perfect. I am but as a runner with the goal still far before me!" And he calls upon others, "as many as be perfect,"—that is (with a touch of irony), as many as might be tempted to regard themselves as perfect—to join him in the race. "Are we ideal, are we perfect, Christians?" he asks. "Are we everything that Christians should be? Then foremost in our character will be the sense of our own imperfection; a conviction of our own personal shortcomings and of the greatness of the goal that lies before us; a divine discontentment with ourselves, and a divine thirst for progress in the things of God."

And then follows the terrible condemnation of those self-satisfied Philippians. Their end is to be perdition. Sensuality is the only god they truly worship. They glory in the shame of a boasted philosophy, which is

in fact their deepest disgrace. Their mind is set, their sincere affections fixed, not upon heavenly, but upon earthly things. Perfect Christians as they vaunt themselves, soaring into an atmosphere above the claims of duty and the labour and effort of this practical and progressive world, they are nevertheless, in effect and in reality, nothing but "the enemies of the Cross of Christ."

"They are the enemies of the Cross of Christ." Somebody may say, "This is an ancient heresy. It is dead. What have I to do with it, or it with me?" Ah! but does a heresy ever die? Heresy is as old as human nature and takes as many forms as Proteus. "Expel" it from one corner of human history, and you will find it "running back" in another. I fancy there are some things we count for heresy that are true, some truths that are heretical. Be that as it may, what is the sum of St. Paul's

chapter but this—that satisfaction with our own character and attainments is not consistent with a truly Christian life? Have we no need of that warning to-day? Nothing is more saddening to even the feeblest messenger of Christ than the sight of those who listen approvingly to his words, and yet remain perfectly contented with themselves, heedless of the truth which they have just welcomed, and making not the slightest genuine attempt to amend their lives. He speaks on the evils of the love of wealth, and on the impossibility of serving both God and Mammon. And there before him is the very man who needs that truth. What happens? The listener nods his careless approval. “Very right, very true,” he murmurs; and on the morrow, with all the old energy and eagerness, he is out absorbed in the self-same task of seeing that Mammon at least shall not want his service—fired by

that very "love of money" of which he has just declared, with the assent of an absolute inward conviction, that it is "the root of all evil." Or the preacher tries to speak of simplicity of life, with special reference, perhaps, to that love of dress in women, which, in its extreme form, is one of the most melancholy, and certainly, in the inner significance of it, one of the most tragic phenomena of modern society; and there before him is the woman whose besetting sin is even this. What happens again? She too listens approvingly; she too knows the truth when she hears it, and probably could name not a few of her acquaintance who might well, she thinks, take such words to heart. And yet, almost before the congregation have reached their homes, in that extravagant pride of dress which is absolutely denied to a Christian woman as well by the express and deliberate judgment of

St. Paul as by the whole spirit of Christ's teaching and by all thoughtful womanly pity for a suffering world, you may see her hurrying out for hours of luxurious enjoyment with her friends—friends who might at least remember that Sunday is a day of rest for their servants, if it is not a day of worship for themselves. These are the anxiety, these the problem, of the Church. What can be done for them? How can we reach and stir them, with all humility and gentleness? How can we give thought to the thoughtless, and a passion for goodness to the unaspiring? How can we fulfil the late Dean Church's ideal of the true preacher by making men feel uncomfortable? How can we shake and startle and shame them out of their inconsistency? How can we warn them, while we warn ourselves, that those who in self-contentment make no effort after Christian progress may yet be found, if not for ab-

solite swerving from the path of right, at any rate for their remissness and indifference, "enemies of the Cross of Christ" ?

Enemies of the Cross! Yes, it is a hard saying which the Apostle thus lets fall into the smooth complacency of our contented days ; yet there is no soul among us to which he does not speak. We may not regard ourselves as perfect, and we may have a real desire for moral growth ; but in proportion to our desire we know our weakness, and our need of a brighter burning of that flame. Here, then, is a challenge for each of us. The Gospel of Christ is the Gospel of discontentment. His Cross is an imperative call to a higher and yet a higher life. Let us strive to make it so for ourselves. In remembering the maxim of Augustine, that "the true perfection of a man is to find out his own imperfection," in seeking to fix and to overcome our besetting sin, in making

some positive advance towards charity and simplicity and truth, let us so labour that we may be able, with however faint a right, to take into our lips the triumph of St. Paul, and say, "Forgetting those things which are behind, I reach forward!"

XVII

THE HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP

“Our conversation is in heaven.” — PHIL. iii. 20.

THIS is one of those passages in which our English Bible cannot be said to give in any adequate way the force of the original; even when we remember that the word “conversation,” at the time when the Authorised Version was made, did not bear its now limited sense, but meant “the general intercourse of life.” The Greek phrase for which it stands is borrowed from the language of politics, and is not found anywhere else throughout the New Testament. It might mean either a political *measure*, an act of policy; or the government of a state; or,

again, the whole constitution of a state, inclusive of the rights of the citizens. And it is this third interpretation which seems to convey most nearly the thought of the Apostle. "Our citizenship is in heaven": St. Paul means that "Christians are citizens of the heavenly city, enrolled on its registers, free of its privileges, and, on the other hand, 'obliged by the nobility' of such a position to live, whether in the City or not as yet, as those who belong to it and represent it." It is the same thought which appears in an anonymous Christian writing of the second century, perhaps in quotation from this very passage: "Christians, as dwellers, are on earth; as citizens, in heaven." It is the same thought which, under different shapes, gave meaning and beauty to the ideal republic of Plato, to the Stoic city of Zeus, to St. Augustine's *Civitas Dei*, and to that New Jerusalem which the visionary of Pat-

mos saw, adorned as a bride adorned for her husband, and descending out of heaven from God.

“Our citizenship is in heaven.” We have, then, here a metaphor which will be found fruitful, as all St. Paul’s metaphors are, in practical suggestion. Every modern civilised community, whatever its form of government may be, recognises, in varying degrees and in different ways, three great ideas: the idea of Liberty, the idea of Fraternity, and the idea of Equality. Every state must do this, because there is no civilisation without law, and to the very existence of law all these three ideas are absolutely essential.

But when we look into facts we find, not only that those communities which make the greatest show of these ideas, and lay the strongest emphasis upon them, often seem to have very little of their substance; but also that in even the best communities there is

much less of them in practice than in theory. We are proud of English liberty; but is there no slavery in England—no slavery of work or of pleasure, no slavery of the West End as well as of the East? Theoretically we make much of human brotherhood; but the one terrible fact that war still survives is enough to throw a doubt on our sincerity. Equality of men we admit as underlying all social distinctions; but to what extent does it influence our thoughts and behaviour in dealing especially with those whom we take to be socially inferior to ourselves?

And these questions gain an immeasurably added force when we remember that they are essentially Christian questions. "Our citizenship is in heaven"; and the city of which the Christian is a citizen and Christ the King, is a city built upon just these three foundations—the idea of Liberty, the idea of Brotherhood, and the idea of Equality. Men

have often proclaimed these great thoughts and ignored their true origin; but take them in their deep spiritual sense, and these are the very ideas which it has been the partial work of Christianity to enforce, and independently of which we cannot imagine Christianity existing at all.

I. First, there is the idea of Liberty. Where do we find that represented in the Christian faith? We find it pre-eminently in the Bible. The Bible is the *Magna Charta* of human freedom. Moral and spiritual liberty is its gift to all who listen to its teaching; intellectual liberty it also promises wherever it is rightly understood; physical liberty it teaches indirectly, as we see in the history of the emancipation of the slave. The more consistently the teaching of the Bible is followed, the less can there be of tyranny, of persecution or oppression, in Church or State. In every sense the Bible

has done more than anything else in the world to break the prisoner's chains and set the captive free.

But if this liberty is one foundation of the heavenly city to which the Christian belongs, let us ask ourselves what share in it we have, what use we make of it? Are none of us the slaves of selfishness, or of some ever-recurring sin? Are none of us fast bound in the fetters of evil passions or desires? Are none of us bowing low to social customs, conventionalities, or public opinion, irrespective of their intrinsic worth? Are none of us toiling in the treadmill of the world, for money which we do not really need? "Let your conversation," writes St. Paul, in an earlier chapter of this letter, "let your conversation (or citizen-life) be worthy of the Gospel of Christ"; and if we are to fulfil in any measure these noble words, it can only be by our really possessing that

twofold liberty which, amid the manifold imperfections of our life and thought, may still be ours—on the one hand, independence of the world, and on the other, freedom from that servitude which the Apostles call “the bondage of sin.”

2. Again, there is the idea of Fraternity or Brotherhood. Where do we find that represented in Christianity? We find it in the first great sacrament of the Church—the Communion of the Lord’s Supper. At this sacred feast men meet together in the name of Christ, as children of a common Father, to whom they offer their sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. They meet, or are supposed to meet, with feelings of brotherly love, laying aside all thoughts that may be inconsistent with Christian charity; and the sense of human kinship, of all mankind belonging to one great human family, which breathes throughout the whole teaching of the Gos-

pel, finds its fullest and most perfect expression in this service.

But if it be true that "all ye are brethren," and that the entrance to the City of God means the entrance into a universal brotherhood, where earthly distinctions are merged in a higher bond of union, then again we have to examine ourselves and see whether the feeling and the atmosphere of brotherhood is a reality in our own lives or not. Supposing that we, in trade, cheat and lie and misrepresent with the hope of increasing our own income at the expense of another; or that we speak lightly or think lightly of the barbarity of "that form of murder which we call war"; or that we take part in doubtful speculations, or patronise or invest our money in companies or industries which may cause ruin, disease, or death to unknown numbers of our fellow-men—in what sense are we the disciples of that Christ

whose Church is founded on brotherhood, and whose Cross is the symbol of love?

3. But there is yet another basis of Christian citizenship—the idea of Equality. We have seen that the Bible pre-eminently represents the idea of Liberty, and one great sacrament of the Church, the idea of Brotherhood. Of the Church with her Bible and sacraments there is but one important factor left; and it is accordingly by this—the sacrament of Baptism—that the idea of Equality is represented. Christianity does not, in the main, interfere with the ordinary conditions of human life, except when injustice is involved. It recognises that inequalities of work and circumstance must always continue among men; though even here it equalises them far more than the world ordinarily dreams of, by attaching always to the greater wealth or the higher position a proportionately greater responsi-

bility. But in baptism all these distinctions are dropped. Men enter the divine society simply as human spirits. You bring a child to baptism, and the Church will not ask or care whether you are a ploughman or a prince. Baptism is thus the mark of men's absolute equality in the eyes of God. It asserts that beneath all the inequalities and anomalies, natural or artificial, which make society what it is, there lies a deep level on which all men take the same footing. Baptism does not create this spiritual equality; it simply declares that it is there; and it calls upon all who have become citizens of the heavenly city to show that they also recognise it by their daily behaviour to those with whom they have to do.

“Our citizenship is in heaven.” Such are the three great thoughts which seem most appropriately to arise out of that conception of Christianity which St. Paul's metaphor

conveys. A brotherhood of free and equal men, we are the citizens of a city of which Christ is King. That is the motive power which controls and inspires our citizenship. Christ is King; and we acknowledge His sovereignty by striving to follow His example; that so, when His kingdom has fully come, we may be like Him because we shall see Him as He is.

XVIII

THE REDEMPTION OF TIME

“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”—EPH.
v. 16.

WHEN we reflect upon the early history of St. Paul himself, we might be tempted to suppose that he does not use these words without some remembrance of his own past. All the education of the young Pharisee had run upon lines far distant from those of Christian truth; the Saul of the past was a man of quite other hopes, and plans, and ambitions than the Paul of the present; and much of his most strenuous effort had been given to the task of opposing that very Christ who had now become to him more than life itself. It might be thought, therefore,

that in this phrase, "redeeming the time," which occurs in more than one Epistle, St. Paul was thinking of the past—was thinking of the homes he had made desolate and the hearts he had broken, in his bigoted persecution of the infant Church; and was warning his hearers to make up, as far as they could, for any time misspent in their own lives. We should, however, be wrong in our interpretation, partly because the original Greek does not admit of it, and partly because St. Paul knew very well that time misspent can never be recalled. Every man's past, its evil and its good—what he has done and what he has left undone—lives in the man to-day. If he has lived evilly or thoughtlessly, he may, indeed, amend his ways and live a pure and noble life; but time lost is still time lost to him for ever. There are signs in St. Paul's Epistles that he was occasionally haunted

by the shadow of his own past; but still, he does not attempt to recall that which is irrevocable; rather, he turns his back deliberately upon it, looks away to the present and the future which are still within his power, and says, "Forgetting those things which are behind, I reach forward."

Would that we always realised this truth! Sometimes you may see a man growing old in years, knowing and foreseeing the shadow of the eternal world upon him, and yet, like Felix, postponing the day of amendment to "a more convenient season." It may be that the time of repentance comes to him, though late, and he is able to offer on God's altar the charred fragments of a wasted life; it may be that the time of repentance never comes at all: but in either case, those years that were misspent can never be redeemed. Or you may see a young man trifling with life, undermining by

misuse or by lack of use his splendid possibilities of power, and even encouraged by those of his elders of whom George Eliot may have been thinking when she justly wrote that "we do not always grow wiser as we grow older." Your wise men of the world, whose "world" is so remarkably limited in scope; your shrewd men of experience, whose experience shuts out four-fifths of the beauty, and the power, and the radiance of life; your cynical men, who understand human nature, and yet have somehow overlooked the divine forces that are at work in humanity, and the divine laws by which it is governed—these will tell you that the poor wretch is only "sowing his wild oats." Mark that phrase and observe the fatal influence of a false metaphor. What if we change the metaphor and say, that every action done or left undone, the man is writing upon himself with an

invisible ink ; whose characters may fade out, and men may look upon the page, and fancy it pure and clean : but the writing is still there, and some day, in the red fire of God's judgment, every line and every letter will start out in the texture of his soul, and the whole man be revealed ! Will not science as well as religion approve our metaphor as true ? For does not science as well as religion warn us that the month or year that is wasted or misspent is wasted or misspent for ever ? It is as the purple flower on the fringe of the meadow cut down by the passing plough. Other flowers may come in its place : that one at least will never bloom again.

St. Paul, therefore, is urging the Christians of Ephesus to redeem not the past, but the present and the future, and the exact rendering of the Greek should be, "*Buying up the opportunity*, because the days are

evil." "Life," St. Paul implies, "is an opportunity: buy it up, whatever be the cost."

Now all men may be divided into two great classes, according as they do or do not perceive that life is an opportunity. To the one class life has a twofold meaning: it means the opportunity of development; it means the opportunity of service to God and man. To the other class life has no meaning at all; they simply drift from day to day; and whether it is business or amusement of which they see the most, there is no real aim or purpose in what they do.

The largeness of this second class is one of the most appalling facts in modern life. As one wanders through the streets of London, or comes into closer contact here and there with the methods and outlook and ways of thought of some of the vast multitude who go to and fro in the great city, there is much indeed of poverty and ignorance and

sordid vice and wasted good to startle and to sadden one; but above all, it is the frivolity, the utter aimlessness of life, that is so terrifying. The fashionable lady, who dreams of nothing but society; the devotee of pleasure, whose thoughts are centred in amusement; the mammon-worshipper, who takes a daily account of his earnings and his profits, but takes no account of his progress in those things which alone make life worth living—these, and such as these, in their unnumbered armies, must touch even the most hopeful spirit with an occasional despair. What can be done? What can be done to stir in them the sense that life is an opportunity, a chance once offered and never to be repeated, of making themselves, and others with themselves, not unworthy to be called the sons of God? For though all men have not the same advantages, all men, as men, have this opportunity in some

shape and in some degree. Only, for all alike it is a chance which must be watched for and seized: it is an opportunity which must be "bought up."

For, again, if St. Paul regards life as an opportunity, in the whole and in its different parts, he regards it also as an opportunity for which a price must be paid; the full price of constant watchfulness and care. St. Paul too, you see, has *his* metaphor—the metaphor of the market or the exchange; and far down in the undercurrents of his mind seems to be moving the thought, that, if men would but expend upon the investment of their intellectual and spiritual possessions one-tenth of the pains they give to the investment of their worldly goods, their redemption would already have begun. And yet it is in the one and not in the other that it is most needful to pay the price. Experience confirms the protest of King

David that he could not—not merely *would* not, but *could* not—make an offering to the Lord his God of that which had cost him nothing. In all the higher walks of life, we neither get nor give anything of value, if it has cost us nothing in the getting or the giving. Andrea del Sarto may say—

“ I do what others dream of all their lives ;
 Dream? strive to do, and agonise to do,
 And fail in doing ; ”

and you might suppose that he was born with the gift of truthful painting, and that the work was easy to him from the first. But it is not so. In the perfection of his form and colour there lies the passion of a long patience ; what Carlyle has called “ the infinite capacity of taking pains ” is somewhere at the roots of his exquisite art ; and if he has the power of doing things easily now, it is a power which has been “ bought up ” only by labour and tears.

Even so, no man is born with the gift of living well. That is an opportunity for which a full price must be paid. Life and life's religion must cost us something, if they are to be of any value to ourselves and others. If each one of us were asked to-day—"What does your Christianity cost you? What sacrifice have you made for the sake of Christ? What right have you to come to church, or to call yourself a Christian at all?"—the question might be a startling one in our ears. But as long as there is formalism and hypocrisy in the Church of Christ; as long as men and women confess Christ with their lips on Sunday, and on Monday deny Him in their lives; as long as society supposes that two hours of well-dressed and heartless worship are an atonement for a whole week's frivolity—so long that question will be asked, and asked again. It is being asked now, and

God in His silence receives and records the answer: it will be asked more openly in a day to come. What has your Christianity cost you? What have you paid out, if only in good example, for the service of men?

Think of that parable of the great judgment-day, and of the last severance of souls to the right hand and to the left. Is it not most remarkable that those who are rejected then by the King and Judge are rejected not because of the positive sins which they have committed (for indeed their life has been outwardly respectable), but for a purely negative reason—for the opportunities which they have lost, for the service which they have neglected, for the good which they have left undone? "Inasmuch as ye did it *not* unto the least of these My brethren, ye did it not unto Me."

"Buying up the opportunity because the days are evil." If St. Paul, looking round

upon his times, could see the greatness of social need and the necessity of social service, surely he would see them even more plainly to-day. We are in the habit of regarding ourselves as an enlightened and civilised and religious people. The judgment no doubt depends upon the standard you adopt; and if the standard be that of the New Jerusalem seen in vision by the prophets, it may be questioned whether, in spite of all our progress, we have yet arrived at either enlightenment or civilisation or religion. Clearly the records of the pauperism and vice of this one city do not point us to any such conclusion. They tell us, rather, that the need is great; that "the days are evil"; that "the opportunity" must be "bought up"; and that every one of us must pay the price. Christianity, which helps us to see the need, helps us also to apply the remedy—the remedy of using our

personal gifts and powers where we can in adding to the wisdom and the happiness of others; to apply it not in the spirit of pessimism, which can only see that the days *are* evil, but in that spirit of true optimism which, in spite of its knowledge, knows also how to be patient, because it has an undying faith in the capacities of the human heart. It is in that spirit—the spirit of Paul and of his Christ—that we must set out, when and where “the opportunity” may be found, to the help of His brethren and Himself.

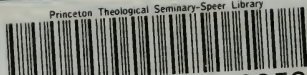
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